

HILDA WALDERMERE.

HILDA WALDERMERE

A Novel

SYDNEY

REGAN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HILDA.

CHAPTER I.

“MY dear Mr. St. John! where have you been hiding so long? and what have you been doing with yourself all these ages? Do you think your friends have forgotten you, and never wish to see you again? or is it you that have grown so tired of them? I hear you’ve been all round the world since I saw you last.”

“I can assure you, Mrs. Henderson,” answered Wilfred St. John, the gentleman addressed, settling himself down in a chair by the side of the speaker, “that forgetfulness of the charms and beauty of the best of my old friends has not been the cause of my long

absence, but like a very distinguished personage of ancient days, I have been going to and fro in the earth, and I am not sorry that my search after good and evil has brought me once more to London, and seated me this evening by your side."

"Where I mean to keep you just now, at any rate," said the lady, "and make you tell me what you have been doing, and everything about yourself."

"Rather a long story," he replied, smiling, "and I doubt its being sufficiently interesting, or perhaps altogether edifying for your gentle ears."

"I hope you've not been getting into any messes," said Mrs. Henderson, "but I've seen so little of you these last few years that I don't know what you may have been up to, but you used to be a good and careful boy."

"So you, my dear friend, were always kind enough to say in the days when you gave me good advice, which I never took, worse luck for me!"

"But, seriously," said she, "you have not been in any difficulties of any sort, have you? I have thought of you so often, and have

never been able to hear more of you than that you were in some outlandish corner of the earth."

"No, nothing serious," he answered, laughing, "you know I have been wandering about the world trying my hand at all sorts of things, and have neither found the philosopher's stone nor El Dorado, but I have found you now, and sufficient for the night is the good thereof, so let us talk of old times, or anything except my adventures, which you shall have some day if you very much wish it; but to-night let me think of lighter and more agreeable things."

"Very well, as you like," answered Mrs. Henderson, "but by-and-by I mean to make you tell me all you have been doing, for you have been away from England something like three years this time. However, tell me now what lucky chance makes you in Park Lane this evening? I had no idea that Lady Waldermere was a friend of yours—"

"And I am afraid," he replied, "that I have even now no claim to say that I have that honour, but I happened to meet her a couple of days ago at a house where I was

paying an afternoon visit, and I was introduced to her and had a little conversation with her, when she, being a lady of much discrimination, at once perceived my merits, and bade me to the feast to-night, and now I want you to tell me something about her, for she seemed charming.

"And so she is," said Mrs. Henderson, "as you will know when you know her better."

"But I want you to tell me more about who she is, and so on," said he, "and then about lots of people, for I have lost the run of everything while in the wilds."

"Very well," she answered, "I'll begin with her. She is the wife of Sir Henry Waldermere, who has a large property and a beautiful place in Warwickshire and plenty of money, which is always a good thing; he is very proud of his family, about five-and-twenty years older than his wife, and a kind-hearted, rather pompous and stiff man of the old-fashioned school. She is half foreign, and married him very young in Italy. They get on very well together, and she is a great friend of mine."

"How pretty she is!" he said; "isn't she very much admired?"

"Yes, very much," she answered; "and, what's more, is not a bit spoilt by it, and has fewer enemies among women than almost any woman I ever knew; she is continually surrounded by admirers, but I never heard of the wicked world saying an evil word about her."

"But you are making her out something superhuman in perfection," said Wilfred. "I shall be afraid to pursue my acquaintance further with this combination of all the virtues."

"I mean you to push it a great deal further," she answered, "for she is a very great friend of mine and I see a great deal of her; and unless you are very much changed, I mean you to become one of our little set, where you will have continually to meet her. Are you going to stay in London now, or what do you mean to do? You can't be rushing away abroad immediately again."

"I really have not an idea what I am going to do," he answered, "and I shall let circumstances, which I suppose means other people, decide that for me. Just at present

I mean to stay in London, which with all its faults is about the pleasantest place I know, and I shall try to civilize my mind and my manners again a little."

"But don't you mean to do anything," she asked, "or are you going to follow the profession of a gentleman?"

"It isn't half a bad profession," he answered, "and will suit me very well for the present till I find that fine opening I see so many men looking for, some remunerative business which is languishing for want of a gentlemanly partner, who knows nothing of commerce, and don't want to work very hard, but who rates his social qualities high enough to make up for all the rest."

"And till you find it, I hope we shall have the pleasure of your society," said she, "so that is settled."

"Which means that I shall be a daily ornament to Piccadilly till the omnibus drivers will know me so well by sight that they'll touch their hats to me; and when I am gathered, there will be a little paragraph in the gossiping papers regretting the loss of a well-known old face, and a short account of

my peculiar weaknesses, with particulars of things I never did and never said."

"Well, that's such a long way off that we need not think of it, but in the meantime I hope we shall have many pleasant days together," she said.

"But you have told me nothing about your own good self yet," said he, "and I very much prefer talking of any one but myself, and of you more than all, *ma chère madame*; all sorts of things have happened to you since I last sat by your side."

Among the all sorts of things being the fact that the late lamented Henderson had gone to rest with his fathers, leaving to his pleasant and cheerful widow nearly two thousand a year. Mrs. Henderson was supposed by her intimate friends to have seen about eight-and-thirty summers, and the cares and troubles of that long period must have sat but lightly on her, to judge by the small traces they had left. She was rather handsome, of the somewhat voluminous type, and one felt after being with her a very short time that there were no angles in her mind or body. She was of a rather dark complexion, and given to a slightly florid

style of dress, but never in really bad taste. For the rest, she was extremely kind-hearted, and would put herself out to any extent for a friend in a difficulty, was very enthusiastic and impulsive, which in a lady of her size and years caused many a smile of amusement to her friends, and she seemed to be nearly always in a hurry. She was hospitality itself, and while believing no evil of any one, and always declaring she could not bear scandalous stories, there was a weak spot about her somewhere which prevented her shutting her ears very close when the shortcomings of acquaintances were discussed.

"Yes," she said, with an effort to look melancholy, "all sorts of things have happened, as you say. I am living alone now in Halkin Street, where you must come and see me; my life would be very lonely if it were not for my friends."

Report said that her life was really less lonely now than it had been during the reign of the late lamented, who was very uninteresting, and being of a rather unsocial turn, and inclined to be selfish, had cut his wife off from a great deal of the society she would

have very much liked, so Wilfred St. John could not help fancying that the present loneliness was of a very endurable sort.

"I am quite sure," he said, "that Mrs. Henderson's friends do not allow her to be very lonely; and if I am to judge of the rest of them by Lady Waldermere, I don't think I could find much compassion for her."

"You shall judge of some of them for yourself if you will," she answered. "What are you going to do on Thursday? I hope you are not engaged, for we are going to have a party on the river that afternoon, and I want just one more man, so you will do charmingly if you will come."

"If I were engaged ten times over," he replied, "the temptation of your charming society, and a river party combined, would be irresistible, so please to count on me at once; but may I ask who the lesser lights of our party will be?"

"The other men are Sir Percy Fitzroy and Frank Digby. I think you must know them both," she answered.

"What!" he cried, "my dear old friend

Frank Digby, of course I know him, few better. I shall be delighted to see him again; can he talk away as fast as ever?"

"He can make himself very pleasant," she answered, "if that is what you mean; but don't you know Sir Percy?"

"I remember him," he replied, "but I never knew him much, he led such a curious life. I was not in London in the days when he was campaigning in the Life Guards, and after that he lived in a set of his own and was a great deal abroad, and I only met him by chance now and then. But you have told me only the most unimportant and uninteresting of the party. I imagine that there are two more beautiful creatures coming, for I remember in days gone by, the rule of a party at Maidenhead was that *chacun* should have his *chacune*, and I have no doubt it remains the same."

"Bessie Addington is coming," she answered; "do you know her?"

"I suppose she is the wife of Charley Addington," he answered. "He, you know, was a very old friend of mine; is he coming too?"

"No," she said, "he is going to let her come without him that day."

"They don't hunt too much in couples; do they? If I remember right, it was not supposed to be the happiest of arrangements," he remarked, "but, you see, I have been abroad for so long, and only the worst side of stories crosses the water, only I heard that she was a pretty woman and had allowed more than one man to tell her so, at which her inferior half has not always been best pleased."

"The world has been very unkind indeed about them," she answered, "and they get on very well now; but I am sure you will like her, she is so bright and amusing."

"I am sure your opinion of her must be correct," he said, "but I am still in ignorance of who the fair link is who will complete the magic circle on Thursday."

"A very efficient one, I can assure you," she answered, "no less a person than Lady Waldermere."

"I am delighted to hear it, for I hoped so much to have an opportunity of seeing more of her."

“Are you already under the spell, then? Take care, Mr. St. John, for I know there is a charm about her that might warm again even those fossil remains in your breast.”

“Those fossil remains are in no danger of ignition, I can assure you; but if they were capable of being again restored to life and heat, I don’t think I should have to walk across the room for the fire to warm them at,” he replied, looking at Mrs. Henderson as though half in joke and half in earnest.

“You need not waste your breath in paying me compliments,” she said, “for I know you of old, but you can take me now to have something to eat, though it is almost too hot for that, but at any rate some of the Waldermere fruit will not be thrown away upon me.”

“What a pretty house this is!” said Wilfréd, as he was making his way across the room with Mrs. Henderson; “there seem to be just the right number of pictures in it, the right amount of light, and the flowers are lovely.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Henderson, “Hilda Waldermere does everything well that she undertakes, and she gives the pleasantest parties

in London that I ever go to, one always meets nice people, and the rooms are never crowded."

"What a pity people don't take more pains with their parties!" said Wilfred. "I always think that with unlimited money and a nice house, one might give such pleasant parties, and yet hardly any one does, and when you ask them why they ask a heap of people whom they don't want to see themselves, and who don't want to see each other, they tell you it is because they are on their list and must be polished off. If I were *them* I would tear the list up, and begin a new one."

"Not quite so easy as you think," she answered, "people think they can do as they like till they begin giving parties, and then they find that they would make such a heap of enemies if they left out a good many people they don't want at all."

"But from what you say Lady Waldermere seems to do it," he answered, "so it must be possible, and when I begin to give parties I shall ask her for the receipt, and she has, as you say, fewer enemies than any woman you know."

“ Lady Waldermere, is Lady Waldermere,” said Mrs. Henderson, “and when you are as pretty and as clever as she is, you will be able to give as charming and well-chosen parties.”

They got down the wide staircase without any pushing or difficulty, and into the large dining-room, where there was plenty of room, and plenty of chairs. It was large and lofty, with very pretty pictures on the walls, and the tables were resplendent with the old Waldermere plate, and a profusion of flowers. Lady Waldermere evidently believed in flowers, and at her parties she always had masses of them.

She was standing talking to two men in the room as they came in, and Wilfred could scarcely take his eyes off her, so pretty did she look.

Lady Waldermere was about seven-and-twenty years old, and the years that had passed over her head seemed but to have added the charms of a woman to those of a girl, while taking away none of the freshness and grace of the latter. Pretty as her face looked on first seeing it, it was only on close ac-

quaintance with her that the full charm of it could be known. The expression of it varied so much when it was brightened by excitement or pleasure, or when it was saddened by some feeling of melancholy, that it was almost difficult to recognise the same person, but whichever feeling it expressed it was always so pretty that it was impossible to wish it to change. A small delicate head with masses of the finest light-brown hair, that shone almost golden with the sunlight on it, and tiny little delicate ears that looked like two little pink shells, and had never been mutilated to put barbaric ornaments into them. An oval face with the nose and chin a little long, but only sufficiently to give a little more of force and character to the face, and a mouth small but full of decision, with two rather full and very red lips showing between them a beautifully white set of teeth; but perhaps her greatest beauty was her perfect complexion, delicate as that of a little child, with a colour so brilliant and so changeable that it was hard to say which to prefer, the soft paleness which made her look so intensely interesting, or the beautiful red flush that showed the warm

blood flowing under her transparent skin. She was not very tall, and had the whitest and most beautifully shaped shoulders and bust, a slight and active figure, and small waist, but graceful as nature had made it and not pinched in to suit the exigancies of the dressmaker. Her small and delicately shaped hands, with tiny little feet that peeped out from beneath the folds of her dress, showed that nature had neglected nothing in perfecting her work. She wore that evening a dark rich dress, open in front, and cut to a point showing just enough of her snowy neck, on which sparkled a beautiful diamond and emerald cross, and her loose and open sleeves, trimmed with rich lace, left bare all the lower part of her beautifully rounded white arms.

As he gazed at her he could not help wondering to himself if he should ever know her really intimately, and if he ever did, whether he should find in that beautiful body a spirit worthy of so fair a shrine, or if he should have to observe once more as before this he had reluctantly had to do, what a pretty head, and what a pity there is so little in it! But the house, the extreme grace and refinement

of everything in it, and the perfect arrangement of the party of that evening, from the numbers and careful choice of the guests, to the fruit and flowers on the table, made it hard to believe that the presiding genius was possessed of a mind unworthy of her fair body.

Wilfred found a comfortable seat for his good-humoured companion, and one for himself by her, and proceeded to administer to her wants. They had not been there very long before a tall and rather spare man, on the shady side of middle life, with a solemn and stately manner, came up the room with a pretty bright-looking woman on his arm.

"Oh! here comes Sir Henry himself," cried Mrs. Henderson, "and Mrs. Addington with him, he is a great admirer of hers, and always carries on a solemn and extremely proper flirtation with her. I'll get them to come here and will present you to both of them, for I have very little doubt that you don't yet know Sir Henry from the family butler, who looks more pompous and if possible more dignified than he does."

Mrs. Henderson drew the attention of the

pair to some empty chairs close to where they were sitting, which they took possession of, and she then presented Wilfred to them.

Sir Henry made a courteous little speech about his pride in having the honour, and his joy at welcoming him to his house, and Mrs. Addington gave him a gracious little bow, and then quickly looked him over as though trying to discover if he was likely to amuse her, and was worthy of her more serious attention.

“Bessie,” said Mrs. Henderson, “I want to introduce to you my old friend Mr. St. John, who, after wandering about the world for many years, has condescended to look in on us again. As I have been unable to keep him in England, I wish you would try what your fascinations can do. He is just now so fresh from the wilds that he thinks his manners want polishing up again. I am sure I could not put him into better hands than yours if you would undertake him.”

“I’ll look on my list, and see if I have a vacancy for a new pupil if you like, Alice, but I thought that you yourself had of late taken to the education of young men,” said Mrs.

Addington, smiling, and looking at Wilfred as though she was speculating if he would repay his education, as Mrs. Henderson put it.

"You need not decide now," said Mrs. Henderson, "as he is coming with us on Thursday, and you can come to terms then if you like."

"I am warranted the most patient and docile of pupils I assure you," said Wilfred, "but Mrs. Henderson ought to say that in days gone by I sat at her fair feet, and learnt not a little wisdom there."

"Which the most patient and docile of animals has quite forgotten," said Mrs. Henderson, laughing. "However, we shall see how he behaves, and how much breaking in again he wants."

Sir Henry sat by in silence while this mild chaff was proceeding, as though it was not a form of conversation which he patronised.

"What do you think, Sir Henry?" said Mrs. Addington, turning to her calm and stately admirer, "don't you think we might give a few lessons in manners to some of the young gentlemen of the day, with very great advantage? Of course, I don't mean to those

who have arrived at the discreet years of Mr. St. John, but to the rising generation who certainly were done out of their money's worth if they paid the extra sum for learning manners when their education was going on."

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Addington," answered Sir Henry with his stiff courtly manner. "I am often perfectly astonished at the way the boys of the present day speak and behave to ladies. I don't know whose fault it is, but deference and politeness to ladies seems to be a thing they don't understand."

"Your generation used up all the good manners," said Mrs. Addington, "and left none for these unfortunate young people. I confess I don't so much mind it with the very young boys; their impudence often amuses me, but their want of politeness when they are no longer children disgusts me."

"Quite true, Mrs. Addington, quite true," said Sir Henry warming with the subject, "politeness seems to be no larger part of the duty of a gentleman according to the idea of these boys, but I am sorry to say that I cannot take the pleasure you do in the forward

manners of schoolboys, who I should like to send back very often to the birch of the schoolmaster to get what their impudence deserves; as for manners now, when do you see a quite young man get up to open the door for a lady going out of the room? or move out of the arm-chair, when he is lolling with his legs up like the mate of a Mississippi steamboat, when she comes into the room or moves about in it? and as for making a bow, why they do it like a hackney coachman," he added, conscious in his own mind that he had studied from Brummell himself in his youth, and then worn out the brim of several hats in practising before a glass.

"Yes!" said Mrs. Addington casting an admiring look upon Sir Henry. "I am afraid the grand manner among young men has quite departed; how pleasant it is to have some friends who still preserve it, and who are so kind as to give us the benefit of it!" she added, giving him a killing glance.

"But, my dear Bessie," said Mrs. Henderson, "Mr. St. John has I assure you none of these failings that you don't seem to mind, and that Sir Henry laments so in the boys of the day ;

he could set a most useful example to them I assure you, and whatever he may say about having become a savage, I don't believe that you could tell he was not educated under the *régime* of the Regency."

"Except by my morals, Mrs. Henderson," Wilfred put in; "when you are giving me a character, please do it thoroughly. The manners of the fashionable men of the Regency were models I admit, but their morals, the less we say about them the better," he said looking up in a solemn manner and thus catching Mrs. Addington's eye with rather an amused expression in it.

"But, Mrs. Addington," he continued, "what has become of that model of manners and morals, your good husband, who in the days of our youth was a most intimate friend of mine, but who I am afraid must have forgotten me, it is such ages since we have met.

"Oh! he was very well, thank you, the last time I saw him," she answered; "he ought to have been here to-night, but he is not. I am afraid you did not teach him the whole duty of man when you saw so much of him, but I hope you will come and renew your acquaintance with him in Prince's Gate;

he is generally in at lunch time, but I cannot answer for him at any other hour. If, however, you ever drink tea in the afternoon, I am very often in after half-past five, and as an old friend of my husband's shall always be delighted to see you," she said with a smile which seemed to say, "and as a new friend of my own," while she was gathering up her fan, handkerchief, etc. preparatory to a move; and then asked Sir Henry to help her to find her carriage, after which with a gracious good-night she departed.

They stayed talking a short time longer where they were sitting, and then Mrs. Henderson said she should ask Wilfred to get her brougham for her. On their way out they passed Lady Waldermere; and Mrs. Henderson, in wishing her good-night, told her that she had secured the services of Wilfred for their party on the river.

"I am so glad to hear it," she said, with the brightest and most fascinating smile, and turning to Wilfred she added, "Are you going so soon?" in the sort of tone that seemed to say, "You may stay and talk to me a little if you like."

He put Mrs. Henderson into her carriage, promising to come and see her before Thursday, and went back into the dining-room, when he found a man just wishing good-night to Lady Waldermere. He stood near her for a few minutes, and could not help admiring the ease with which she said a few words to three or four people who were taking their departure, and the charm of her manner, which expressed to them, more than any words could, her kind welcome to them in her house.

"I have come, Lady Waldermere," he said, going up to her when she was speaking to no one, "to wish you good-night, and to tell you how kind it was of you to ask me this evening to such a pleasant party, and such a very pretty house."

"I am very glad that you have been pleased with both," she answered, "and I hope that you will make a much better acquaintance with the house before long. I saw you were talking for a long time to Mrs. Henderson; is she a very old friend of yours?"

"Oh! yes," he answered; "I have known

her for years, and I was so glad to meet her again; she tells me that she is a great friend of yours, and, as she told you, has been so kind as to ask me to join your party on Thursday, which will be delightful."

"Yes, I am very glad you are coming. I'm so fond of the river, and I think it will be a pleasant party. Don't you enjoy being back in England again?" she asked, "or do you find it dull? I think you told me you had been abroad for some years. I wonder if you find society much changed?"

"I have hardly had time to judge yet," he answered, "but if all London parties, have become anything like yours this evening, Lady Waldermere, I find it changed most wonderfully for the better. Nobody seemed dull or bored, and nobody was in any hurry to go away."

"I dislike feeling dull, or being bored myself so much," she said, "that I do my best to prevent my friends being either, in my house; and if I succeed, I am well rewarded for my trouble."

"A great many people share your feeling," he answered, "but they are in spite of it often .

very dull, and very much bored; cannot you impart your secret to some of them?"

"I am afraid not," she said laughing; "it is not to be imparted, but it may be learnt."

"May I take lessons?" he asked.

"Why, do you mean to give parties?" said she.

"No, not at present," he replied, "but I am a searcher after knowledge of all kinds, and when I see that it is possible to avoid a fault so many people commit, I am curious to know how it is managed."

"Well, I'll give you leave to come to my house whenever you like, and at the end of the season you shall tell me if you have discovered my secret."

"If there was no such object," he answered, "I should accept your charming offer only too willingly, but I hope before the end of the season that you will not find that one part of your secret power has failed, and that you will at last have to confess yourself bored, for I mean to try you well I can assure you."

"Very well, then I will promise to tell you when I find myself bored, and you shall tell

me when you have discovered my secret; that is a bargain."

"In which, I think, I shall be the gainer," said Wilfred, "and now, Lady Waldermere, that I may not run the risk of letting you feel the sensation at once, I am going to make my best bow, and wish you good night."

Wilfred walked leisurely down Park Lane, and up Piccadilly to his rooms, and feeling more disposed for meditation than society, did not join in the rubber of whist, which it had become almost a second nature to him to indulge in before going to bed.

He had scarcely been into any society but that of men since his last return to England, and he had found his past evening so agreeable, and the society he was among so pleasant, that he thought he would come out of his shell, and once more adventure himself into the society of ladies.

Was it his long absence from England that made him think it, or was he really right? but he thought that never before in his life, no, not even in his youthful and impressionable days, had he met so charming a woman as Lady Waldermere, and he made

up his mind, if only to satisfy his curiosity, to see more of her, and really judge. Mrs. Addington, too, seemed most lively and pleasant, and he had no doubt that she and his old friend Charley, her husband, made their house very pleasant; and then, too, there was the kind, good-natured Mrs. Henderson: altogether there seemed to be the elements of some very pleasant society during the next few weeks.

CHAPTER II.

WILFRED ST. JOHN was a younger son, with several brothers and sisters. His father, who was a barrister, had been dead some years, and his mother had not long survived him. Of a good old family, and himself a younger son, his father had worked hard at his profession, and was rising to eminence when he died in the prime of life, leaving behind him a fair fortune, of which, on his mother's death, Wilfred inherited eight or ten thousand pounds. His eldest brother had followed the profession of his father, and the second had gone to sea, as there has always been one of the family sacrificed in early life to Neptune, and Wilfred after the regular course of school

and Oxford, had been put into one of the fashionable Government offices, not caring about the Church as a profession, which at one time his family thought he would take to. His two sisters were both married, one to a man in diplomacy who was always abroad, and the other to a country squire who lived in Kent, where he and his wife lived a quiet and contented life, farmed, looked after the neighbours, and had a lot of children.

Wilfred was tall and active, rather intelligent-looking than handsome, but with an air of high breeding, and a natural courteousness about him. He had extremely good abilities, which he had only used at school and college to carry him easily through the necessary examinations, never having been ambitious to distinguish himself in anything but all the amusements and sports, in which strength and activity more than brains command success. He inherited from his father a high sense of honour, and a certain amount of his ideas of duty, with however but little of his industry and perseverance and power of hard work. From his mother he got a most sensitive and affectionate disposition, and a mind

imaginative rather than practical, by no means the qualities necessary for pushing his way in the world, and the result was that he had been sometimes passed in the race by men of inferior qualities, but whose greater amount of brass and thicker hides pushed through where his sensitiveness prevented him from struggling in.

He left Oxford at the time when the muscular Christian was the reigning deity, with Charles Kingsley for his prophet, and for a short time he worshipped at that shrine with some enthusiasm. Under the influence of this phase of feeling he felt all sorts of ambitions rise within him, and a desire to be doing something in the world rather more decided and more exciting than writing very prosy official letters, and reading the morning papers all day ; and though he went in pretty strongly for the round of dissipations of various kinds that make up the life of a rather smart young man whose duties keep him permanently in London, but do not occupy too much of his time or mind, he never became debauched, and his manliness of character saved him from rarely deteriorat-

ing under the demoralizing influence of his life.

The death of his mother removed the only tie which kept him in England, and having a few thousand pounds he determined to gratify his roving and restless disposition by wandering about the world. He left the Government service, and went first to one out-of-the-way place and then to another, sometimes on business, and at other times on pleasure bent. In the pursuit of the latter he succeeded very fairly, but not so much could be said of his success in the former; perhaps he may have had unusually bad luck, but possibly a want of perseverance, and a love of change and speculation, may have had something to do with his repeated failures to make a fortune in spite of the number of his attempts, and the great variety of the times in which they were made.

He had never in his life read at all steadily, but he had got through a larger amount of desultory reading than most men, and was a man that could come quickly to a conclusion, and generally to a fairly accurate one. As far as women were concerned, he had begun

life with a great touch of the romantic, and a belief in them in general, with a considerable readiness to fall in love, only equalled by his facility in falling out again, and the tendency to flirt was naturally strongly developed in him, not that he was by deliberation the flirt systematic and determined, but that he felt at times so much in earnest that he made love to a woman with all the seriousness in life, quite forgetting how often he had done it before, or how often he was sure to do it again.

He had enjoyed pretty well all the pleasures of the civilised and half-civilised countries he had lived in, and had been back to England two or three times in the last ten years, so that he had by no means lost the way of talking to, or the power of pleasing his own countrywomen, whom he had found by no means the least pleasing among the women of the world whom he had been thrown amongst, and he had now returned again at the age of five-and-thirty with a greater belief than ever that the society of women made up the chief pleasure in life, but quite convinced that all danger of his repose and peace of mind

being disturbed by the softer passions was quite past. He had not improved his capital by his various occupations and speculations, but on the other hand he had 'not damaged it enough to prevent his hanging on in London without doing much. He had many friends who urged him to make a sensible marriage, and so repair his finances and settle himself down in life; and he often made the excuse that he was looking for a wife, cover a good many most unnecessary flirtations, which, as the fair lady of the moment's admiration was in more than one instance already attached, could have hardly been said to have been undertaken with any view to matrimony.

CHAPTER III.

THURSDAY came and brought with it a most lovely June day, one of the days which restores the confidence of the Briton in his climate, neither too hot nor too cold, and with a feeling of delightful freshness about it.

The party met at the Paddington station to go by an early train in the afternoon to Maidenhead, and when Wilfred St. John drove up he found Frank Digby waiting already at the door of the station, having taken a carriage, tickets, and everything, for he was one of those men who pride themselves on their powers of arranging. He had heard that Wilfred was coming, and welcomed him

most warmly, and they could recall more than one occasion on which they had met at the same place on the same errand in years gone by.

The rest of the party soon arrived, and Sir Percy nodded his recognition of Wilfred, though they had never really known each other in days past. He was a man of forty, slight, actively built, and rather tall, with a very expressive and handsome face, large rather melancholy eyes, and a long silky moustache. He had been left early in life with a very good fortune, and had gone into the Life Guards for a short time, but when he had taken his fill of the light discipline of that corps, and of all the enjoyments which young Life Guardsmen generally indulge in, he gave up soldiering and led rather a wandering life, sometimes hunting in England, sometimes living on the Continent, and at times wandering further away. He was clever and had very considerable powers of making himself agreeable, which he had exercised most perseveringly on the fair sex, and report said that he had some grounds for the irresistibility of attack, which he always insinuated rather

than boasted that he possessed. He was a man who could take his place well among men, and make himself pleasant enough to them when he chose, which, however, was not very often, and it was much more among women that his praises might have been heard.

Frank Digby was a few years older than Sir Percy, and a very different character. Bright and good-humoured, with an inexhaustible flow of spirits when in society, he was equally popular with men and women. He had led a careless, reckless sort of life, always in debt, and in some scrape which a woman was sure to be found at the bottom of, but which he always came out of again with the same imperturbable coolness. Very kind hearted in reality, and thoroughly honourable and straightforward, he was still not the best mentor for a light-hearted boy just beginning the world, or a young and pretty married woman taking her first plunge into society.

"I congratulate you on your recruit," he said to Mrs. Addington as they went together towards the carriage; "St. John used to be the most useful man on a party of this sort,

and was a companion of mine in many pleasant days now forgotten."

"Is that such a recommendation?" asked that lady. "Why, you yourself insinuate that your companions, though often amusing in those days, were not always edifying."

"Will you answer me honestly now, Mrs. Addington," said he, with mock earnestness, as they got to the door of the compartment the others were getting into, "do you come down to-day for amusement or edification?"

"Whatever I come for, I know which I am likely to get from you," she answered.

"Knew I should not get an answer!" he replied. "But I will tell you that whichever it was, you will get about the same from St. John that you would from me, but perhaps he has grown more serious since those days; take him in hand and find out, won't you! By the bye who is to have the honour of punting you about to-day, have you made up your royal mind yet?"

"I shall not take you, for you tell me such shocking stories; I think I shall let Mr. St.

John have the honour, but I am not going to tell you afterwards what he says to me, if I do take him."

"Then I shall devote myself to the fair widow," he said, "and pump St. John afterwards."

"Very well, you may, and I am quite sure that you will find her quite incorruptible, and perhaps she may be able to keep you in order," she answered.

"I like being kept in order, you know," he said, "if one is not kept in order, where is the fun of breaking out?"

"And if one isn't talking to a woman of strict propriety, what is the use of trying to shock her, I suppose you mean?" she added.

"Shock! Mrs. Addington, I hope I never shocked a lady in my life; I always carefully feel my way with them, to know how far I can go!" said he.

"And are you quite sure that you always stop when you have found the limit?" asked Mrs. Addington.

"You ought to know that," he answered, "I never speak for myself."

"Then your character is sadly belied,"

said she laughing, and getting into the carriage.

Wilfred, who felt rather the stranger of the party, was curious to watch the sort of terms that the rest of them were on with one another. He saw that they knew each other very well, and soon perceived that Sir Percy assumed an air of taking possession of Lady Waldermere, but whether the lady approved of it or not, he could not find the slightest sign to show him. She had about her such a bright air of gaiety and liveliness, and laughed so readily at anything at all amusing, that it was impossible to detect what her more serious thoughts were, or if she had any seriousness about her at all.

He soon found that Sir Percy had made up his mind to devote himself exclusively to her that afternoon, and that Frank Digby had opened his batteries on the widow, so he determined to try and find out what the charms of Mrs. Addington were, which had secured for her so many faithful admirers, whom report said she amused herself with, used, and threw on one side without one moment's compunction.

Secure in his armour of indifference to any woman in particular, and his liking for their society in general, he opened fire on Mrs. Addington, by whose side he had comfortably settled himself as soon as the train had started.

"Are you fond of making new acquaintances, Mrs. Addington?" he asked, "or are you one of those people who, having a great many pleasant ones already, think it quite an unnecessary trouble to extend your number?"

"I rather like new ones," she answered, "but I should have to tell you so after your question whether I did or not; but I like them to make my acquaintance and save me any trouble; they must come to me, I never go to them."

"I always think," he said, "that it must be so amusing for a woman to see the different ways that men have of first trying to make themselves agreeable to them, we men cannot have any idea of the ways and manners of other men with women, and I fancy that they are totally different from what they are with each other."

"But you take it out the other way," she answered, "many of you make love, or whatever you like to call it, to any number of women, and you see their different ways with you, which we cannot."

"Oh! no, but that's quite different," said he, "you see it's a man has to do all the talking, and the making himself pleasant, and all that; the woman sits quiet and watches her opportunity, and responds or not as she likes; she need not show her hand a bit unless she chooses. Now a man, however insincere he may be, and however little really in earnest, must say and do something; and I cannot fancy that they are all alike."

"More alike than perhaps you think," she said, smiling; "men are not altogether the imaginative animals which they flatter themselves they are. But the greatest difference is between the old hands, who do it for amusement, and the unpractised ones, who are very much in earnest when they try to make themselves agreeable to a woman, and proceed entirely from their preconceived opinions of her, which are often very funny."

“Which do you get most amusement from?” he asked.

“Well, I like both in turn,” she said, “but as far as our business in the matter is concerned, the skill to attract them on our part may, I think, be compared to that of yours between shooting a bird flying or sitting; with the one, if you want to secure them at all, you must be prompt at first in what you say or do, the others sit for you to kill them when you feel inclined, and you have often to shout at them to make them run away when you don’t want to shoot them.”

“And when bagged, is there much difference?” he asked.

“Of course there is,” she answered, “for you don’t kill them, you merely catch them to tame them, and there is a great deal of difference in the ease with which some are tamed.”

“There is indeed,” he said, “as much difference as between the eagle and the domestic goose. I know which is the bird that suits many women to have in the house always,” said he.

"Yes, but he is only for the necessary domestic purposes, not for amusement; an eagle or a hawk is for ornament and amusement; you all have your uses, and if women are only clever enough they can put you to them well enough."

"Do you keep a gander at home, Mrs. Addington?" said Wilfred, laughing. "Have you turned Charley into that useful domestic bird."

"Never you mind about Charley," she said, "you can see him and the way I keep him whenever you like, and then you can judge for yourself. I am not discussing husbands with you; we began about whether I liked new acquaintances, and husbands are very old acquaintances."

"And are not supposed generally to take much trouble to make themselves over agreeable, at least so I have always understood from their better halves."

"Men like you are pretty sure to know most intimately the wives who don't get on best with their husbands. If husbands sometimes took a little more trouble to be pleasant and companionable to their wives,

there would be fewer unhappy couples, fewer dangerous flirtations, and less amusement for men like you. You will think I only say it because I am a woman, but I think that in five cases out of six, when people are unhappy together, it is the husband's fault, and the world always lays all the blame on the woman."

"I have always rather thought with you," he answered, "but it is often the husband's misfortune as much as his fault, he don't know how to make himself pleasant."

"If he would only try," said she, "we should make plenty of allowance. Strange as it may seem to you, many women don't want a clever husband, but we nearly all of us begin by trying to like and get on with our husbands. Hardly any woman marries who does not really mean to do her best by him, and then gives him a very fair trial before she makes up her mind that domestic bliss is not her lot in life."

"You will find it hard to persuade many men of that," said Wilfred.

"Yes, that's the pity," said she; "they are so pig-headed that they think they must

always be in the right. There are foolish women, of course, whom nothing would content, but they are I am sure the rare exception."

"What do you think," said Wilfred, "of having lectures of instruction on the whole duties of husbands, don't you think they might be taught something of the nature and requirements of women?"

"Not they," she answered, "only the men would go to them who know nearly all another man could teach already; the ignorant and stupid would not, for they think that the light of nature, which is with them a darkness that may be felt, is quite sufficient to teach them how to treat a woman. You will never get those sort of men to pass a law to flog wife-beaters; in their obtuse hearts they have a strong sympathy with them, and would like to flog their wives every time they make fools of themselves, and they see she is aware of it."

"You two seem to be having a hot argument," said Mrs. Henderson, attracted by the energy of Mrs. Addington in enunciating her opinions; "has Mr. St. John

been propounding any very startling questions?"

"Oh! no," said Wilfred, "we have only been discussing the shocking behaviour of husbands in general, towards wives in general."

"And have you quite left out, of wives in general towards husbands in general?" asked Frank Digby.

"There is no such question," said Mrs. Addington, "as you ought to know, Mr. Digby, for you pride yourself on knowing a good deal about married life, that is, the married life of other people; you are one of those men who would encourage women to make mistakes, and then lay all the blame on them."

"But whom else should I lay the blame on," he asked laughing, "you don't expect me to lay the blame on myself, or any other man?"

"You want always to run with the hare, and hunt with the hounds," she replied, "but you get caught along with the hare now and then I am glad to say."

"But," said Frank, if a woman does not

quite hit it off with her husband, you women always side with the husband; and if she makes any serious error, you jump upon the woman, and the husband who has 'druv' her to it is looked on as a martyr. If you good women were only true to each other, you could have your own way tremendously, and there would be no need of leagues and rights, and that sort of nonsense; but though individually you would most of you like to do as you please, you don't quite see why any other woman should enjoy the same privilege. Now men, when they see that they want a thing, combine and stick together, and the more tacit the combination is the stronger it is; but women have not the power, or don't choose to show it, and I don't expect to live to see them do it; when they do, men will be forced to treat them in some different way."

"But don't you allow that many husbands make their home so miserable to their wives that they force them to make friends out of it?" she asked.

"Of course I do," he answered, "the world would be very dull for us who are unattached if they didn't."

"He is incorrigible, Alice," said she, turning to Mrs. Henderson, "can't you keep him in order? I wish you would take him in hand."

"He is very good with me," she answered, "he only says those things to you to see what you will say, he does not mean them."

"Oh, don't I though!" said Frank, "I always mean what I say."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have meant it every time you have told a woman she was charming, and that you would love her all your life if you had the chance?" said Mrs. Addington.

"If I ever said it I certainly meant it, at all events at the time," he answered, "it would be no fun saying it if I did not feel it at the moment."

"About all the amount of feeling that men ever have, I believe," she said; "to hear them vow and swear what they feel, one would think they were passion and sentiment itself; and as for constancy and all that sort of thing, that they would die before they ever looked at another woman, if you could only watch them after one of those scenes of passion,

you would see the impassioned one light a large cigar as soon as he was on the doorstep of the house, walk off to his club, have a little gossip with two or three other passionate lovers, and then, after studying the evening paper and eating a large dinner, go to the play or opera, and end the night with a rubber of whist."

"You have drawn your picture to the life, Mrs. Addington," said Digby, "it is just what a man would do, but I don't know why he may not feel in spite of going through the routine of life, and all that is to him as much the routine of life, and affects his feelings as little as shaving or taking his tub in the morning; would you like the impassioned one to go unkempt and untubbed, as well as to take to fasting or become unsociable, to show the depth of his passion?"

"Don't you think," said Wilfred, "that one is apt to think that people do not feel, because they cannot rend their clothes or tear their hair? Now, a woman can no more take up the tail of her gown and tear it off, because her lover leaves her for her best and dearest friend, than a man can do like Sir Tristram or

Sir Lancelot who went 'woode' mad, whatever that was, and ran naked and dirty rampaging through the country, because their young woman was cross, or her husband had locked the door in their face, and made a grimace at them out of the window through the bars."

"Of course," said Mrs. Addington, "it is easy to make things seem ridiculous, but I don't believe that men feel much in these days."

"I grant you that there are many men who counterfeit the grand passion very well indeed now," said Wilfred, "but I still maintain that they are capable of feeling just as much as ever men were, and that there are men, and there are times, when they feel as much as human nature can feel, and I believe suffer all the more, because the laws of society and the feeling of the age oblige them to bury their feelings in their own hearts."

"I am sure, I believe, that men have a great deal of feeling in them, and that a great deal that is not true has been said about their heartlessness; I believe that they generally feel more than they say, and that it is more

often women who are unkind to them," said Mrs. Henderson; who always lived in the happy belief that several men were in love with her, and spent much thought and care in keeping them at a distance, divided between a regard for her own liberty and the sanctity of her comfortable person, and a feeling of distress to her soft heart at the pain she must give them in driving them away.

"There! Mrs. Addington," said Frank Digby, "you see at least one fair lady says a word for the feelings of us unfortunate men, and does not think that all the cruelty and faithlessness is on our side."

"Well," said Mrs. Addington, "I give you my opinion and I stick to it, but I cannot argue on such a warm day, and it is against my principles to argue at all. I don't know how I was drawn into it, so we'll agree to differ, which I believe people always do at the end of every argument."

The train had by that time arrived at Slough, as the party were informed by a comfortable and portly gentleman whose face and voice are known to many thousands who frequent the Great Western Railway.

"I am sure," said Wilfred, "if ghosts ever haunt any place, that a stout one will in future days inform Macaulay's Maori when he comes here that the place is Slough and that he may change for Windsor."

"Near which place Macaulay's school-boy was educated," said Digby, "and he will look with regret on the deterioration of the educational system of New Zealand, which will quite fail to turn out the like of that boy of universal knowledge."

"Whose name, I am informed, was Francis Digby, while report says that this universality of acquirements cost more birches than grew in Windsor Forest," said Wilfred.

"Well, if I did have a large share of the twigs of the tree of knowledge, I think that at the same time the fruit was served up to us regularly both raw and in pies, for which my appetite was prodigious, and the result is before you."

"Yes," said Mrs. Addington, "it is indeed, but I think that we are led to understand that the fruit of the tree was of two kinds, and we can guess which was the sort that generally fell to your share."

“ Well, whichever kind I ate in those days, I had not the gentle hand of woman to tempt me to it, but it was forced upon me by the heavy hand of a ferocious master ; but later in life the fruit has more than once been offered again, and by no heavy or ferocious hand, I can assure you, Mrs. Addington.”

“ I fancy too many of us go nibbling at it all our lives,” said Wilfred, “ and it leaves but a bitter taste behind it, for all its sweet flavour at the moment.”

“ Now, Mr. St. John,” said Mrs. Addington, “ once for all we will have no moralizing to-day. Hilda,” she went on, turning to Lady Waldermere, whose conversation with Sir Percy had come to an end, “ here is Mr. St. John come down to a party at Maidenhead, and he has been guilty of moralizing before four o’clock in the afternoon.”

“ My dear Bessie,” said Lady Waldermere, “ he has not yet had the advantage of much of our society, but I hope we shall quite cure him of moralizing at all before we have done with him.”

“ But *I* hope you don’t mean to have done with him for a very long time,” said Wilfred.

“and if you mean to keep me in hand till you have cured me, I shall go on persistently moralizing till the end of the story.”

The train had by this time arrived at Maidenhead, and Frank Digby at once showed his activity by securing flyes for the party, and a few minutes' drive brought them to the well-known ‘Skindles,’ where he had secured a room looking down the pretty lawn to the river, and ordered the most correct dinner for the occasion.

The party who had come down were not at all of the opinion that pleasure on the river was to be obtained on a hot afternoon by sitting crowded together in a boat for about three hours, till every one was talked out and tired, and had had far too much of the whole of the rest of the party, and was wishing the whole time to take some chosen one apart, and prove that companionship and sociability do not mean a crowd.

They had tacitly arranged how they were to divide, and Sir Percy took possession of Lady Waldermere without any hesitation, while Frank Digby arranged the fair widow and her charms to the best advantage upon a great

cushion in the stern of a punt, and Wilfred did the same for the lively Mrs. Addington.

The comfort of an immense cushion in a punt, covered by a heap of shawls, must be experienced to be fully appreciated ; and there is hardly any place where a pretty woman looks so pretty, and at the same time has such an air of luxurious dignity as reclining in a punt on a bright day, under the shade of the deep foliage of the trees that border the banks of the beautiful Thames ; the three ladies of the party had fully learnt to understand all the advantages of the punt system, and would have turned up their fair noses entirely at the idea of any other way of taking the air and the water on such a day.

Quietly and easily they made their way up through the lock in which on the afternoon of a Sunday in June or July so many of the fairest faces well known in the gay world of London are always to be seen, and on to the still deep water past the green woods of Taplow Court, and up along the beautiful reach, which from its fair throne of lawn, leaf, and terrace, the halls of Cliveden look down upon. Very easily, did the men take the

labour of punting their fair cargoes along, a labour so light and simple to the old hand, and so hard and hopeless to the unexperienced.

Wilfred kept up an animated conversation with his companion, whom he found more and more agreeable as he proceeded; and though she was more disposed for what was gay and lively than anything which bordered on the more serious, he was quite able to understand how more than one man had arrived at finding her so pleasant. As they became more intimate, and the conversation grew more personal, Mrs. Addington got almost sentimental, and Wilfred began to think that she had found another affinity, or wanted him to think so, and that she had an eye to adding some of the portion of his scalp which was still left, to the collection in her own inner chamber at the wigwam in Northamptonshire.

"Why have you never married, Mr. St. John?" she asked, as he was resting from his labours in front of the lawn at Cliveden.

"For a good many reasons, my dear madame," he answered; "want of means,

want of the right woman, and want of the wish to marry her, have all combined at different times to prevent it. But are you going to recommend me to think of it, that you take this sudden interest in 'my want of a wife?'"

"No, I am not going to do that, but as I know you more I am surprised that you never have, most of your contemporaries must be married, like Charley."

"Perhaps that is one reason," he answered, "for as long as they prove their exquisite taste in wives, like him, and those fair ladies will allow me to be their friend, I don't see why I should make an experiment for myself."

"Do you think that your friends being married, it saves you the trouble?" she asked.

"Well, to a degree it does," he answered. "I find myself in the society of most charming married ladies, for I confess I prefer a married woman to an unmarried one; and I have no necessity for running the risk of proving what a damsel will turn out like when married, others having taken that risk for me. You see, Mrs. Addington, every

woman changes enormously after she is married; with many their character alters entirely, and a man cannot tell for some little time what he has got hold of, whether she will turn out the prize or the blank."

"Then, why have you not married a widow?" she asked.

"If I ever do marry," he answered, "I should not be at all surprised if it was my lot to console some bereaved one, for hitherto the misfortune has been that the ones I have admired, and almost broken the tenth commandment about, have always had a lawful owner present in the flesh; are you beginning to see a little more now why I have not hitherto taken the serious step?"

"Which I suppose, put into plain English, means that you have been always flirting with your friends' wives, instead of looking out for one for yourself," said she.

"There, Mrs. Addington, you are jumping to a conclusion very rapidly," he replied; "is it necessary to flirt, as you call it, with every agreeable married lady who is a friend of mine?"

"I don't say that it is *necessary* to flirt, as

I call it, and a good many other people too, but I think that experience has proved that it is almost inevitable when two people who suit and get on well together become very intimate."

"You think that a little playing at love-making whiles away the time nicely," said he; "I suppose it does, but with many men it becomes such a matter of fun that it merely amounts to the natural compliment they pay to an agreeable woman."

"Well, I believe it does rather," she answered, "and one becomes quite used to it; in fact, I think if I see no sign of it that I become a little astonished, and wonder what he is up to."

"Then, I fear you must have begun to wonder what I am up to," said he laughing, "for I am afraid that I have shown no sign yet of doing my duty."

"Oh! you are different," she answered. "I don't know why, but I did not expect it from you, and I prefer growing to know you as we are without your saying what you don't mean."

"Thank you very much for a very high

compliment," he said, "but take care that if you go on so pleasantly I don't end in saying what I do mean."

"That's so far off that I will take my chance of it," she replied.

On they pushed the punts under the beautiful woods of Cliveden, and past that most charming of summer retreats, the island of Formosa—which well and fairly deserves its name,—through the pretty little lock at Cookham, where there seems to be an eternal encampment of wandering artists, and would-be Robinson Crusoes, who appear to delight in trying how many of the discomforts of frontier life they can bring into the midst of civilisation, and try in their morning dreams to mistake the cry of some very matutinal bargee shouting for the sleepy lock-keeper, for the yell of the savage come to make an early requisition of scalps.

At Cookham their journey was over, and tea was brought to the three ladies in the punts, moored alongside each other.

"Well, Alice," said Mrs. Addington to the widow, who with her figure of a mature Dudu, in a rather close-fitting thin summer's dress,

was lazily reclining on her cushions, "how has Mr. Digby been behaving?"

"Only fairly well," she answered; "you set him off before we started, and I have had a little trouble with him."

"Very little I am sure," said the party accused, "but I was telling Mrs. Henderson the story of the old lady who insisted on falling in love with me, and she will not believe me."

"I am sure it is not true, and you had no business to tell me," answered Mrs. Henderson.

"But it is true," he persisted; "now, shall I tell it you, Mrs. Addington, and then you can judge for yourself if it is not a most natural story?"

"No. I've had enough of it," said Mrs. Henderson interrupting him, "and you shall not give us that over again."

"Has Mr. St. John been moralizing any more?" asked Lady Waldermere.

"Oh! no; he has been quite good, and talked very nicely," said Mrs. Addington, "he is becoming quite civilised again."

"What are the signs," asked Digby, "a proper admiration nicely expressed for his

fair and interesting companion, is that among the more hopeful signs ? ”

“ He has not told me of any old woman who has been in love with him, at any rate,” she answered.

“ Then it’s only because he never had one love him so dearly, or insist on being so unmistakably demonstrative of it,” said the irrepressible Frank, “ or he could not have resisted telling the story.”

“ If either old or young has ever been in love with him, he has the discretion to keep o himself,” she said.

He thinks discretion is the better part valour, and so I told my elderly and amorous admirer when she—”

“ Now, Mr. Digby ! ” cried the widow, interrupting him, and almost raising herself from her soft bed, “ I will not have you repeating that most improper story again ; you must be good.”

“ Yes, then, I will be as goody-goody as ever you like,” he said, “ but I must tell that story to Mrs. Addington ; she will laugh as much as you did.”

“ I did not laugh,” she answered, “ and I

shall now punish you by making you punt me back in silence."

"Couldn't do it," he answered, "must talk when I punt, or the punt stands still."

"Well, then, I shall not answer you," she said, "and if your tongue and your arms are so sympathetic, I suppose I cannot alter them."

Tea was over, and the party started together on their downward journey, floating softly down the stream, and lazily watching the flickering sunlight through the trees, while the water, just stirring the soft green leaves of the lilies and the graceful stems of the bullrushes, made a low gentle rippling sound against the sides of the punt, so cool and refreshing as to bring a calming and tranquillizing feeling to the most restless spirit.

Easily and smoothly they let themselves drift down the river till they came once more to the woods of Taplow that overhang the water with such inviting shade on a hot day. Sir Percy, who was a little in front of the others, had pushed his punt under the branches of an overhanging tree, and called to the others as they came up to come and rest there

a little, so the other two pushed the punts once more alongside each other and settled themselves comfortably there to enjoy half an hour's repose in the lovely scene and weather.

"How delightful this is," said Lady Waldermere, "how infinitely pleasanter than hot, crowded London. I always envy the people with these charming houses down here."

"But I think you would be very sorry," said Sir Percy, "to exchange your house in Park Lane for the best of them. It is only the contrast that makes this seem so charming. I remember so well in years gone by, I have thought how delightful it must be to live continually among all that is delightful of scenery and climate, and as I have generally in my life managed to try most of my fancies, I made this experiment; and after much wandering, settled myself in the spot that seemed to me to have every charm, but I had unfortunately forgotten to exorcise one demon who came sneaking in and spoilt it all, and this unpleasant visitor's name was *ennui*! It must be a clever man or woman who can settle themselves for long among all that seems to make

life most delightful, and quite escape a visit from him ; and he has the unlucky habit of coming most regularly to visit those who seem to have the power of shutting the door most securely against him. I am afraid that work and occupation, or change, are the only doors that will really keep him out ; the one the defence of the poor, the other of the rich against him."

"Yes," said Lady Waldermere, "that is very true, no doubt, and applies well to any one who chooses to shut themselves up alone in some out-of-the-way place, but my idea was of a place not more isolated than Maidenhead and Cookham, and of no more solitude than my numerous friends in London allowed me. If you mean to bury yourself, and lead a hermit's life, you should do it thoroughly ; and I fancy that you would find the hairy gown and the mossy cell, with all their attendant discomforts, the most effectual weapons against the demon who drove you from your retreat. But I don't want to retreat from the world a bit, I like it very much, and I have not yet found that it has much ill feeling against me."

"I quite agree with you, Lady Waldermere," said Digby, "the world, society, whatever you like to call it, isn't half a bad place, and though it may be pleasant enough to go into retreat now and then, if you have secured, *bien entendu*, the right companion, a return to the world is always pleasant, and I always think when I return to London or Paris that I am not sure that I and my companion do not enjoy ourselves more there than in our solitude."

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. Digby," said Mrs. Addington. "I cannot fancy you very long in a hermitage doing Edwyn, even with the most charming Angelina. I think it would want a relay of them to keep you amused, not that I don't partly agree with you myself, I never yet tried the isolation experiment, and I am not sure that I should not give Edwyn rather a rough time of it."

"Or require a relay of Edwyns to keep you amused, Mrs. Addington?" said he.

"Still, in spite of all the nonsense you two are talking about hermits, this is very pleasant," said Lady Waldermere; "we only want one thing to make it perfect."

"Can we not supply the one thing needful?" said Sir Percy, "with you, to command is to be obeyed."

"You might have the will of the Genius of the lamp," she answered, "but I fear not the power: I was thinking that in the old days, in France or Italy, at a party such as ours, the minstrel was always an attendant to while away the hour of rest under the shade with romantic stories of love and adventure. I fear that the race of minstrels is extinct, or that in this prosaic age they would find no employment."

"I am afraid that you would really require the Genius of the lamp to supply your want," said Sir Percy; "it is beyond my power."

"But cannot one of you supply his place?" she asked. "Cannot your experience, Mr. St. John, supply us with a story to pass away half an hour, while we lie here and listen?"

"I fear that the mantle of no troubadour has descended on me, Lady Waldermere," he answered, "but if you think that your patience is equal to it, I will tell you an old legend of this very place where we are, but I must

beg you to make every allowance for my want of the true fire of the minstrel; and the absence of a harp, which would however be of but little use to me."

Wilfred then sat himself so that he could watch the lovely face of Lady Waldermere under its broad shady hat, and gather from it inspiration to help him in repeating the old legend.

"I must carry you back to the days when Arthur was King, and when the Knights of the Round Table tilted in the lists at Camelot or Caerleon under the fair eyes of the lovely Guinevere, or wandered far and wide in search of adventure: In those days, when the passions of men and women were stronger, and were not under the restraints of our later civilization; when so great a part of their lives was isolated, and though their mind may have been narrower, if you will, from the want of education, and from the absence of books, and a continual intercourse with their fellows, their feelings were more concentrated and enduring; when love really meant love, and hate meant hate, and were no mere passing fancies, but became a part

of the lives of those whom either had taken possession of.

“In those days now so long passed away, this beautiful scene was as fair to look upon, though the halls of Cliveden and Taplow did not then crown these leafy heights, but the river sparkled in the summer sun beneath the forest that was parent to the soft shades we are now resting under, and wide meadows, free of fences, stretched away, rich and green, for many a mile; over which wandered the herds of the feudal lord of that day. The rugged pile of towers that formed his stronghold looked down in grim strength from the hill above us, and though every trace of them has disappeared long years ago, they looked then strong and firm enough, fit sign of the iron hand that held them of the stern lord of the district, who was by turns a cruel robber chief, oppressing all around him, or the gentle knight of romance, the guardian of the weak and ill-used, and the dread of all evil-doers.

“In the days of the great King, Sir Palorac was lord of the castle, as fierce and cruel a man as ever drew the sword of a knight,

and it was with no willing steps that he went to the court of Arthur, there to make his mock submission, to become a traitorous member of the glorious order of knights, and to swear false oaths as the fair Queen Guinevere placed round his neck the collar of the famous brotherhood. Tyrant and oppressor as he was, it was with a smile in his heart that he swore to fight against all such as himself; but he was strong and bold, and could hold his own well with lance and sword in the lists, and plausibly enough could he talk while he remained at the court; and once again in his life was the brave and unsuspecting King taken in by a bold face and a strong arm.

“Who that looked on the hard, fierce face of Sir Palorac could think that love could have aught to do with him? Love shall it be called? no, not love, I will not profane that holy word by breathing it in the same breath with the name of Sir Palorac. The fire that burnt ardently and fiercely enough in his coarse and brutal nature, had nothing in common with that pure and holy flame that inspires higher and nobler souls, but

with this fierce and unholy fire did he look on the fair Eldrida.

“Beautiful as the morning was that fair maiden, with her large, soft, blue eyes, and her crown of golden hair, and gentle and loving she was, made to be the companion of some kind and loving spirit ; not one of those women who can hold their own in the world, and take their part boldly enough in its struggles and cares, but one who, uncheered by sympathy and love, would wither away, and would submit with a sigh and a tear patiently to the woes of life, should fate and fortune be cruel to her.

“The orphan daughter she was of Sir Bevidor, who was killed fighting by the side of the great King, and who in his dying words commended his only motherless daughter to the care of his loved monarch. Of ruined fortunes, he could leave her no portion ; and she was brought up at the court with no other dowry than her sweetness and her beauty. There Sir Palorac saw her, and her gentleness and fair face so worked upon him that he resolved, if possible, to carry her off as his bride to his grim fortress in the valley of the Thames.

"Of wooing and love,"
 cared but little, if he could but win the fair Carinor
 of the King, her only daughter, and on
 but little of maidenhood, for she was
 that once gained he thought he could
 else to prevent him from carrying her away
 amuse his hours of solitude in his castle.

The consent of the King was gained all too easily, who saw but in him a valiant and strong knight, a sworn brother of his glorious order, and possessed of wide and fair lands, the fit husband of the fair and portionless child of his faithful old follower.

"But who shall paint the feelings of the unhappy Eldrida when the desire of Sir Palorac was told to her, and that he had obtained the consent of the great King. To her his will was law; she loved and worshipped him as the kindest and best of fathers and guardians, and the idea of disputing his will could never enter her mind. But, unhappy child, what was she to do, her heart had long ago been given to another! For her, one crest alone had ever flashed amid the glistening pennants of the tournament, and to her belief the mighty Lancelot or

Tristram themselves could never have stood before the impetuous fire of the bright young Carinor. He, who from a child had been her friend and play-fellow, who a few years older than her, as a page about the court, had day by day petted and played with her, and had lavished on her all the little attentions and kindnesses that a chivalrous boy could show to a little helpless girl, while she in return had given him her whole heart and soul, first as a little child, and then as a fair maiden blooming into the first beauty of womanhood, when she watched his first feats of arms, and heard men praise his strength and valour. He in return loved her devotedly, and she knew it. Though there had never been between them any formal word of plighted troth, each one felt that none such was necessary, each knew the other's heart so well that no bond was necessary to bind them together for life, and they knew she would be his bride, when he had won his place among the Knights of the Table, and the King should have placed him in one of the border castles to repel the invader, and to keep order on the frontier.

“When Sir Palorac pressed his suit Carinor was away, having been sent by the King on a service in which he hoped to win his spurs, and he was now already expected home again. The unfortunate girl only longed for his presence to put an end to all her troubles by going to the King, and telling him of their love. She could not; her awe of the King, and her maiden modesty, forbade her to tell of a love that was sanctioned by no formal tie; so all she could do was to gain time, and she trusted that her lover would shortly return and claim her as his bride. All she therefore asked of the King was a delay of three months, and that, as the daughter of a noble knight, at a public tournament the heralds should honour her name by proclaiming that Sir Palorac challenged all comers to do battle for her hand. She felt no doubt that her Carinor would have returned long before that, and never doubted for one moment that her love would steel his arm to the destruction of the hated Sir Palorac. The monarch smiled at her request as a fancy of maiden vanity, and readily granted it, naming a great feast day

more than three months to come for the tournament, when her marriage was to be celebrated in the evening with all due pomp.

“Days and weeks passed by, and Carinor returned not; some of his comrades-in-arms had come back to the court, telling of how well and nobly he had acquitted himself against the foe, and how his impatience to return again to Caerleon had made him hurry on before them; but no word of his fate ever reached the court, and as the long weeks grew into months, his friends all mourned for him as dead.

“Sir Palorac waited the three months with some impatience that his will should be thwarted for even that short time, but he had no apprehension as to the result. He had learnt all the story of the love of Eldrida for Carinor, and had no mind that the hot-headed young man should cross his path; and long before the day for the tournament arrived, Carinor was lying sorely wounded in the dungeon of the castle of a lawless ruffian like himself, who was but too ready to help him in any villany. Well and bravely had he fought.

when waylaid, and two of the minions of Sir Palorac had he sent to their account before he was overpowered by numbers. Sir Palorac would have wished him dead, but his base accomplice had a dread that the news of a cold-blooded murder might reach the ears of the King and bring his certain destruction, so he was borne a helpless captive to his stronghold.

“As the dreaded day drew near the heart of poor Eldrida sank with despair; her Carinor was dead, she felt sure; if he was above the ground, he would have been ere this at her side. It seemed to matter but little what became of her, she had no courage to struggle against her fate, and she could only pray that she might die of her grief before the dreaded day arrived. But it came all too soon. Bright was the day, and gay were the lists that the lovely queen and her fair companions looked down upon, and many a lance was broken to win a glance of approval from those bright eyes. The heralds blew a loud blast and proclaimed the challenge of Sir Palorac, and the knight in full armour, rode proudly and triumphantly down the lists with no foeman to encounter him.

“The evening came, and the ceremony was performed amid the glare of torches and the sounds of trumpets, and Eldrida, dressed by the hands of the queen herself, was handed over a pale and shrinking bride to the hand of Sir Palorac, reading with fear and horror in his fierce eyes the coarse pleasure with which he gazed upon her beauty.

“Little needs it to tell of the sadness and despair of her life; the slave of a man she trembled before, and the sight of whom filled her with dread, yet condemned to be the plaything of his every caprice, and shut up in his gloomy castle that overlooked this fair valley. Many a time did she gaze from its battlements, over the river and wide green plains in her noon-day walks, or watch through her lattice at night when the moonbeams sparkled on the rippling water, and long and sadly did she muse upon the fate of her dearly loved Carinor, while two long weary years rolled by and brought no word of what had befallen him.

“All these two dismal years the unhappy Carinor pined in his dungeon, and there might have stayed till he died of despair, had not

the mighty Lancelot, wandering in search of adventure, passed that way. Hearing that the lord of the castle had been guilty of many misdeeds, and that even then he held many unhappy wretches captive in his hold, he commanded him to deliver to him the keys of his castle, and go with him to the King to answer for the wrongs he had done. His only answer was a sudden onslaught with his followers on Lancelot, but his mighty arm bore all before it, and after he had slain the base knight, he freed the unhappy prisoners in the dungeon and destroyed the castle. Great was his surprise and joy to find the long lost Carinor there, and eager were the demands of the unfortunate lover for news from the court, and of his fair Eldrida. Fierce was the wrath of Lancelot when he learned the baseness of Sir Palorac, and deep was the oath that he swore to help Carinor in his revenge. The despair of the unhappy lover may be imagined; he could not believe that Eldrida had in her heart been false to him, and Lancelot told him how every one believed that he was dead, and had impressed it on the maiden;

and when he had to relate all the particulars of the tournament, Lancelot said, 'I liked not ever his grim face, and I always mistrusted his fair words, and I pitied the pale gentle maid who was to become his bride, but I knew not then aught of her love for you, and had I known it, ready as I would have been to lower his arrogance, I could not have entered the lists against him; but now we will seek him out, and he shall pay the price of the evil he has done.'

"Together they returned to the court and found that the King had been summoned hastily away to repel an invasion of the heathen, and that Sir Palorac was with the host of the King. Thither Lancelot had immediately to repair, but the strength of Carinor had not sufficiently recovered to bear arms, and he had to stay behind. Then there came upon him a longing to look once more upon the face of his beloved Eldrida, to learn how she had borne her fate, and to find out if possible if she still remembered him. As he could not put on the armour of a knight, he clad himself in the garb of a minstrel, and taking his harp, set out from the court for the castle.

in the valley of the Thames, where his love was pining away.

“The minstrel, in those days welcomed everywhere, found an easy journey to the towers of the absent Sir Palorac, and on a fair summer’s evening arrived before the gloomy portal. Long and sadly did he gaze on the dark walls that enclosed all that was dear to him in life, and troublous and cruel were the thoughts that crowded into his mind, long racked by sorrow. At last he stood before the gate and touched the strings of his harp to call the attention of the warders. How he longed instead of that peaceful dress, to be clad in mail and helmet, and in place of the peaceful notes of his harp, to sound on his bugle horn a blast of defiance to the man who had wronged him so foully and deeply.

“He was soon admitted by the warders, only too glad to welcome a minstrel to help to pass away their weary hours of idleness in the absence of their lord, and soon the news was carried to Eldrida that a minstrel was within the castle walls.

“It was dusk when Carinor entered the hall where she was sitting with her maidens,

and he shrouded his face in his mantle that she might not see who the minstrel was who had come to visit her. Sadly and earnestly did he gaze upon that loved face, and marked the change in it that sorrow and despair had wrought. There was the same soft golden hair that hung in long shining tresses down her back, and the same large sweet blue eyes ; but thin and wan was the face that he had last seen bright and joyous, and gone was all the gladness and brightness he had loved so well. In a voice, from which all the joy of life seemed to have departed, she asked him of the news from the court and the camp ; but seemed, when he answered her in a disguised voice, as though she had no interest in his answers, and as if her thoughts were wandering far away. Then she asked him to refresh himself after his journey, and to help to while away the hours of the evening with his harp and song.

“Carinor tuned his harp to its saddest tones, and began a story of love and sorrow ; a story into which he wove the whole secret of his life, the deep and faithful love of years, and then the misery of separation and cap-

tivity. He told of the long sorrows and despair of the poor captive who only supported life to gaze once more upon the face of her he loved so well, then of his freedom once more from chains, of freedom only to find that she, whom his whole life was wrapt up in, was the bride of another. Gently and kindly he touched on what she might have suffered and borne, and then, with louder tones upon his harp and in more happy strains, he told of revenge and triumph, and of love and happiness at the last. Gradually, as she listened to his song and story, the tones of his voice came familiar to her ear, and as she heard the sad story of his cruel captivity and grief, she knew that her loved Carinor was before her. The clouds seemed to pass from her life, her grim lord with the king was forgotten, and she remembered nothing but that he, who had made all the sunshine of her youth, and the thought of whom was her one solace in her misery, was alive, and was then before her. What could she have to dread now he was near her once more; he, who had always been her friend and her protector; and she felt that

now he had come back again, all the brightness must return to her life.

“What needs it to tell of the happiness of these two once more united! Those who have loved so long and well, and, after long separation, have once more been united; those, and those only, can tell of the blissful hours they passed together, of hours all too sweet and too dangerous. Day after day did the minstrel linger on at the castle, and the lovers lived on in their happiness, day after day, as though there was no future before them.

“Ere Lancelot could reach the camp the news had come to Sir Palorac that he had destroyed the castle of his friend and freed all the captives, and that Carinor was once more free, while Lancelot knew all the story of his infamy. Sir Palorac did not wait for his coming, but, feigning bad news from his home as an excuse to the King, he set out with all haste for his castle on the Thames. Fast as he could come did he hurry on with a few followers, and he arrived before the castle gates totally unexpected one soft summer’s evening.

“From the heights of the battlements did the lovers see him with his men-at-arms sud-

denly emerge from the wood and ride up to the portal. Escape or concealment was hopeless, and Carinor, alone and unarmed, was at the mercy of his deadliest foe. Silently, with pale faces and hand clasped in hand, did the lady and the minstrel await his coming on the summit of the tower. He heard at once of the long stay of the minstrel in the castle, and was at no loss to guess who the wandering minstrel was.

“Filled with fury and revenge, he climbed to the height of the tower where the unfortunate pair awaited him. Few were the words that he wasted on Carinor ere he fell upon him with his sword. Unarmed and desperately wounded, Carinor wrested a sword from a follower of Sir Palorac, and it seemed for a short space that his desperate valour would be triumphant; but Sir Palorac was clad in mail from head to foot, and the unfortunate Carinor, overpowered by numbers, breathed his last sigh at the feet of the wretched Eldrida. She, pale with horror and grief when she saw that the last hope in life had left her, waited not for the rough hand of her lord to be laid upon her, but sprang from the

lofty battlements on to the paved court-yard below.

“ Lancelot reached the camp in time to aid in the overthrow of the heathen invader, and immediately after set out to complete his vengeance on Sir Palorac ere he should escape his hand. Quickly he arrived at the castle above the river, but all too late to befriend the luckless lovers, yet in time to find Sir Palorac there and to challenge him to come forth and to take his chance of dying in honourable battle, which, trusting to the strength of his walls, he refused to do. So Lancelot stormed him in his hold, and hung the recreant from his highest battlement, where he had slain Carinor, and where the unhappy Eldrida had sought the death of despair. Slowly and sadly Lancelot rode away, leaving nothing behind him but a fire-stained ruin to mark the spot of the sad story; and long did he muse on the perversity of fate, which so often joined together those who should be kept asunder, and separated those whose union would make to them a heaven upon earth. Back to Camelot he made his way, and told all the sad story to the queen, and who, better than she and

Lancelot, could tell the sorrows of two beings whose hearts were indissolubly united, but between whom inexorable fate had placed a barrier that nothing could surmount?

“Centuries have passed away since those sad days, and every trace of the castle has vanished long ago, but still the story lives, and 'tis said that when the moonlight glistens on the silent river, and its soft rays flicker through the deep shades of the wood, side by side have the phantoms of those ill-fated lovers been seen wandering round the scene of their happiness and their misery. And well may many a pair who like them have known the misery of loving so well and all in vain, to whom hard fate has decreed that they shall never make each other's happiness in this world, and who side by side have floated down this lovely river, remember the story of their sad fate, and drop a passing tear to the memory of their sorrows.”

As Wilfred St. John told his story, Lady Waldermere seemed to have watched him with deeper and deeper interest, and looking sometimes into her beautiful face, and sometimes into the deep shades of the woods as though

he saw there the events passing that he was telling the story of, he felt as though he gathered inspiration as he went on, and the fair lady before him reclining so gracefully and easily on her throne of cushions and bright coloured shawls, with her wide shady straw hat, and her thin white dress with no ornament but one deep red rose, seemed to him to be fitting queen to rule over battle or tournament, and as his thoughts wandered away to the days of King Arthur, he thought, if Guinevere was as fair as she, what wonder was there in Lancelot's undying love for her through fair and foul. After he had ceased speaking they were all silent for a minute, some of them perhaps half-lulled to sleep by the soft warm weather, and the sound of his voice, the others each following the train of thought that his story had awakened in them. Wilfred was looking still at Lady Waldermere, scarcely aware that he was watching her so intently, his thoughts were so far away, and he felt as though he had carried her away with him into the days of romance and chivalry. The first who broke the silence was Mrs. Henderson, who asked Wilfred, "Is the story really true?"

"Every word of it," said Frank Digby; "I've read it all in the 'Morte d'Arthur,' a book I can recommend to your perusal, Mrs. Henderson. They were real good lovers in those days; don't you remember what Walter Scott says of three of the most celebrated of them?"

And still these lovers' fame survives

For faith so constant shown;

There were two who loved their neighbours' wives,

And one who loved his own.

"I am afraid," said Sir Percy, "that human nature has been the same since the beginning of the story; you may try as hard as you like to make love go in his proper course, and may do your best to bind him with every tie, moral and social, but he will always defy you, and will go on having his way, whatever you may say or do to the contrary, to the end of the story."

"We must give the thanks of the company to our troubadour," said Lady Waldermere. "I don't think that even the Genius of the lamp could have provided better for us; in which country in your wanderings did you learn your art, Mr. St. John?"

"If I have succeeded in pleasing you for

half an hour," he answered, "it has been by no art of my own, but by the combined inspiration of the old legend, the time, the place, and," he added looking at Lady Waldermere, "the audience."

"I wish the story did not end so sadly," said Mrs. Addington; "must life always be sad and miserable for people who love each other very much? What a pity Lancelot could not have knocked the obnoxious husband on the head, Eldrīda would have made such a nice widow."

"What a pity several obnoxious husbands cannot be knocked on the head," said Frank Digby; "you see, unfortunately it is too often the deserving lover who gets knocked on the head, and the obnoxious husband grins a grin of triumph, and treats the unlucky wife worse than before; but it is perhaps as well that now-a-days the knocking on the head is done morally and figuratively, and not so practically as in the days of dungeons and daggers."

"A very good thing for us to-day," said Mrs. Addington, "as I fear one of the most amusing members of our party would be missing."

“Which heaven be praised he is not,” said Digby, “whichever of them you may be alluding to, Mrs. Addington; but as he is here, in the flesh as well as in the spirit, it is necessary that he should dine, and reluctant as I am to suggest moving, I must remind the company that the hour is already past at which I bade them prepare the banquet at the hostelry of Skindle, as it is trying the cook and our own selves rather too highly to linger here all night.”

Unwelcome though the idea of moving was to all the party, it had to be done at last; and they once more pushed out into the river, pausing for a minute when there to look back up the beautiful river, to where Cliveden with its windows all on fire with the setting sun, and the whole of its outline shining like burning gold in its rays, seemed to be lifted into the air above the dark mass of foliage below, and looked like some enchanted palace, the abode of the beautiful princes and princesses of fairy tales, whose heights, if the adventurous wanderer on the river tried to scale, would ever elude his steps, and only lure him farther and farther away from the realms of reality to those of imagination.

There are few places in the world more pleasant for a well-assorted party to dine at than one of the rooms at Skindles', looking over the lawn to the river, on a fine summer's evening. The party who had just been growing sentimental over the sorrows of unhappy lovers and maidens in the days of Arthur and Lancelot under the shady woods of Taplow, were quite of this opinion, and they did not find that fresh air, beautiful scenery or sentiment, had at all injured their appetites, and gudgeons and green peas were properly appreciated, while the liveliness of the conversation gave ample proof that they were not yet tired of each other's society.

After dinner they went out on to the lawn, to enjoy coffee and cigarettes in the soft clear twilight air. The lawn opposite was brilliant with flowers, and the masses of red geraniums looked blood-red in the falling darkness. The arches of the old bridge threw an inky shadow on the still water, while the half circles of the sky, seen through them, were still glowing in the crimson and gold hues of the expiring sunlight. Three or four men from the Guards' Club next door were

lounging lazily in punts, or paddling slowly about in canoes,—a colley dog, inhabitant of the place, was wandering round to see if one of his numerous tribe that frequent the Club-house, had come down that day, to help him to pass the evening away by playing or fighting as he might feel inclined. There were very few other people at the hotel, the Sunday crowd of well-known frequenters of the river being absent; the only amusement at the moment was to watch the efforts of an aspiring youth to punt a rather pretty girl about in the still evening. It was evident he was new to the work, but punting being to the young lady's taste he had gallantly and resolutely undertaken the task; the art of working a punt along in a straight line is, however, unfortunately not one implanted by nature, and the unfortunate youth evidently found out too late that he was making a fool of himself. He pushed gallantly a few yards from the bank, and then the punt refused to do anything but twist round and round; in vain he changed the pole from side to side, and ran frantically up and down the punt, it refused to do anything but remain in the

middle of the river, under the amused eyes of the young Guardsmen and the party on the lawn. At last he gave a despairing push with the pole, which seemed to send it more in the desired course, and not to lose his advantage he changed the pole energetically to the other side, nearly braining his fair companion as he did so, and sending a shower of drops over her; in he plunged it, but, alas, for the aspiring youth! the bottom of the river above the bridge at Maidenhead is beset with a deep hole, in which more than one enterprising young punter has come to grief; and into the depths of this hole he desperately thrust his pole, imagining that he should find the water the same depth as the other side. He leant all his weight on it, and there was a slight shriek, half of amusement, half of alarm, from the fair occupant of the punt as he disappeared with a smothered exclamation of disgust into the dark water. He soon reappeared having parted company with his pole; and though he knew more about swimming than about punting, he had some little difficulty in getting hold of the side of the punt; and when he had succeeded

in doing that, a great deal more in doing what is so easy to an old hand, but so difficult to the uninitiated, which is getting into it. Several times he was half landed in it, and fell back again into the water to the amusement of the lookers-on; and when at last he had scrambled in, he stood there dripping and forlorn, without even the treacherous assistance of a pole to get the punt to shore with. However, one of the young Guardsmen in a canoe went to his assistance, and he landed at the lawn, and retired to change his things, looking sadly crest-fallen, and anything but the enterprising young waterman who had left it for an evening's 'spoon' but a few minutes before.

Wilfred found himself sitting at the feet of Lady Waldermere, and looking up into her face in the dim light, a little apart from the rest of the party.

"You look quite melancholy, Mr. St. John," she said, "are you mourning for the fate of unhappy lovers, or what causes it?"

"I am afraid I have a habit of looking melancholy when I am thinking," he answered, "but I am sure I have no reason to, this

evening, for I have spent the most delightful day which has passed over my head for many a year, and am I not even now sitting at your feet?"

"I am very fond of a party of this sort," she said, "and I think everything has combined to make it pleasant."

"Yes," he said, "but you can hardly fancy how pleasant to me, who have been wandering about the world for so long, and to whom to return to society like this of to-day, is to return to fairy-land."

"Then long may he stay in fairy-land, I should say," she answered; "but I must tell you once more that it was very good of you to think of a story for us, sad though it was; and there are so many sad things in life, that pass continually about us, that I hardly know why we should take a pleasure in recalling the sorrow of others centuries ago."

"I am glad that the story proved worth listening to, even in an idle half-hour under a tree on the river," he answered; "but the time and the scene seemed to suit it pretty well, and to me there is nothing more interesting, or really sadder to see in life, than an ill-

assorted union between two persons, when one of them is very sensitive. There are few griefs in life which have no alleviation, and for which there is no escape, but that is one."

"Do you think that there are many?" she asked.

"As far as I have seen of life," he answered, "I think that there are but too many of different degrees, but I am happy to say that I think the cases that amount to actual misery are rare, but instances there are, and I often think that for a woman—it is much worse for a woman than for a man,—for a very sensitive woman to be hopelessly tied to a man she cannot even like, there can be no greater or more continual unhappiness."

"Yes, a very great unhappiness," said she in rather an abstracted voice, "but I hope one seldom sees it."

"One hardly ever sees it," he answered, "unless you know a woman's life very intimately; the more sensitive her nature is, the more she will hide her sorrow from the world, or bear a brave and cheerful part in society."

“I believe that you are right,” she said; “I always think that the most sensitive people are the bravest, but whatever their troubles they cannot, after seeking in vain to console them, jump in despair from high towers; they must bear their burden even to the end.”

“Yet there are comparatively few,” he said, “to whom life does not bring some consolation, and some happy moments; and I think that whatever my griefs in life may be, I shall look back upon this day as a bright spot to cling to.”

“I am sure I hope you may have many as bright a one,” she answered, “and I hope you may help us to enjoy one many a time again; but I have given no reward to my troubadour,—what will he pray for?”

“Your favour to wear in his cap?” he said.

“I am afraid the days of favours in the caps of knights have gone by,” she answered, “but they may wear their ladies’ flowers in button-holes, so I will reward him with this one, rather faded though it is,” and she threw him the bright red rose that she had worn all that day in her bosom.

He picked it up and put it to his lips with a manner half in jest and half in earnest, and put it in his coat. .

The evening was at last drawing to a close, and the train which will not wait was coming near. Reluctantly the party had to tear themselves away from the cool dark river, and return once more to hot crowded London.

CHAPTER IV.

THE day after their party at Maidenhead, Wilfred St. John found at the club he was most in the habit of frequenting, a note from Mrs. Addington asking him to dine at her house on the following Sunday, as her husband wanted to see him again, and telling him that she hoped most of the members of the river party would be there. He had no engagement, and as he was doing nothing particular that afternoon, he thought he would be himself the bearer of his answer, and inquire after the health of his fair companion in the punt. So about half-past five in the afternoon he presented himself at her house in Princes Gate.

There was certainly one thing which Mrs. Addington's enemies, and she had a good supply of them, could not accuse her of, and that was of bad taste, and of not understanding how to make her house comfortable, which she always set herself steadily to do wherever she was; and as money was no object, she did not let the consideration of it stand in her way. Her house was one of the prettiest in London, and the rooms were not only pretty and comfortable, but had an air about them that seemed to banish all stiffness and restraint, and to put every one at their ease as soon as they came into them.

Wilfred was received at the door by two gentlemen in powder, and passed on to a very smart individual in plain clothes, who showed him upstairs and into a small and most luxuriously furnished room at the back of the house, which opened into a very pretty conservatory. On this room Mrs. Addington had lavished all the ingenuity of her mind. The colour of the walls and furniture was dark; there were very few pictures in it, but a great deal of beautiful old china very prettily

arranged, so that it could be perfectly seen, but so that it was possible to move in the room without danger of knocking it down as one turned round. In the conservatory was a little fountain that splashed with a cool and refreshing sound, and from which there came into the room a delightful scent of jasmine and heliotrope, delicately moderated, and not making the air at all heavy with their perfume. The carpet was the softest velvet, and the chairs were so deep and comfortable, it seemed impossible to get out of them again; and, altogether, as Wilfred came into the room, it impressed him with a feeling that the man who could not spend in it a most pleasant hour, in the company of a pretty and agreeable woman, was the most undeserving and unappreciative of mortals.

Mrs. Addington was sitting in a low chair, with a prettily carved little ebony table by her side, on which was a beautiful set of Dresden china tea-things. She was dressed in a dark gown that fitted tightly to her graceful figure, and showed it off to the best advantage, and had her hair done very plainly; there was something in the neatness of her

dress, and in the air of activity of her supple figure that suggested an unusually good horsewoman. Without any real beauty, there was something extremely taking about Mrs. Addington. Rather tall and slight, with very bright eyes and pretty teeth, and glossy dark-brown hair, she had about her the impression of perpetual good spirits and readiness to amuse and be amused. Always ready to hear an amusing story, or to enjoy a joke, she seemed as though sentiment or even seriousness rarely troubled her. The eldest of three sisters, with an extremely good fortune, she had been petted and spoilt in her childhood, and brought out at a very early age; she had soon been the centre of several admirers who were attracted alike by her prettiness, her bright vivacity, and her comfortable dowry. It was no wonder that she had been a good deal spoilt, and it was only very considerable natural kindness of heart, and generosity of temper, that saved her from being very selfish; but as it was, with all her readiness to do what was kind and considerate, she liked to have her own way, and when she could not, or found considerable obstacles in the way,

her impatience too frequently got the better of her kinder nature, and she did not much scruple what revenge she took on whomever had thwarted her, or how she swept the obstacles out of her path. It was this part of her, and a habit of saying whatever came into her head, without much regard to the feelings of others or the consequences to herself, that made her so many enemies, while this sort of recklessness made her 'a much pleasanter and livelier companion' than many more particular or scrupulous women. But all that she was, and was not, had to be learnt in due course by Wilfred St. John; all he saw at present was a pretty and very agreeable woman, who seemed to like him, and to be quite ready to let him amuse her to his heart's content.

"This is very good of you to come and cheer my loneliness," she said looking up at him with a bright smile, and holding out a pretty white hand to him as he came up to the side of the low chair she was sitting in.

"Too good of Mrs. Addington," he answered, "to welcome me so kindly; I had

some misgivings that she might have had almost enough of my society and small talk during all the time she was imprisoned with me yesterday afternoon, with no escape from my chattering."

"You may sit down now in that chair," she said, "and for the rest you need not disturb yourself; when I have had enough of your society, I will let you see it so plainly that you shall have no doubt upon the subject. I am not one of those people who think it necessary to look charmed with the people who bore me unless I have some special object to gain from them, and that is not very often."

"I see you believe in plain speaking, and in very generally letting the world see what we think; do you consider that it answers?" he said.

"I don't bother myself so very much about whether it answers or not," she replied. "I generally only consider what is easiest and pleasantest; and I don't see why I should make myself so pleasant to people who bore me as to encourage them to be always kicking their heels in my drawing-room."

“Certainly many houses would be much pleasanter if people could find some effectual way of eliminating the dull people and the bores. I quite appreciate the force of expression of the lady the other side the Atlantic, who sent the message to the man, ‘You tell him that he need not come leaving his gum shoes at my house any more.’ If one could only give a few more people what sporting men call the ‘straight tip’ in that way, it would be a very good thing. But don’t you find you make enemies?”

“I am sure I don’t care if I do,” she answered; “why should I be afraid of them if I do? One must take one’s chance; and as I have already plenty, a few more or less don’t matter. The people who like me will always come to see me, and I am sure I don’t want the others. But tell me while I think of it, did you get my note, and can you dine here on Sunday?”

“I both got your kind note, and shall be only too happy to dine,” he answered. “I really want to see Charley again; I wonder if he is very much altered since the days when we saw the good and the evil of life together in London.”

"Of course he is altered," she answered; "has he not had my society for the last five or six years?"

"Has he become a model husband, and as slow as a top?" he asked, laughing.

"He does very well," she replied; "and without being like a top, whatever that may be, he is no longer a young bachelor, but I am not one of those people who object to a man having sown a crop of wild oats. I am afraid I have always had rather a weakness for men whose ways in life have not been the correctest."

"You rather believe in the charms of a Lovelace?" he asked.

"Why, I hate dulness," she said, "and I like to be amused, which I hope you will quite understand, Mr. St. John, as you get to know me better; and I must say that I have so very often found the men, whose characters are spoken of rather sadly by very goody goody people, the most amusing."

"I am afraid that it is very often the case," he said; "but the men of pleasure or fashion, as they were called in the old-fashioned novels, who amuse you are very seldom serious in what they say."

"That," she said, "does not for one minute concern me, as long as it amuses me. I am not a child of seventeen, believing all the nonsense that is poured into her ears. I don't care if it is earnest or not."

"I am afraid too," he said, "that the child of seventeen is much more easily impressed by the old practised flirt than by a much more earnest and deserving admirer, and that the halo of naughtiness round his character is not without its secret charm."

"I am afraid I must confess to having a little of the same feeling myself," she answered; "there always is some additional attraction about a man who has a history. I don't quite know why."

"I cannot help fancying," said Wilfred, "that what causes it is a little of the same feeling that induced their great mother to eat the apple, which she has bequeathed in some degree to all her daughters. I think curiosity to find out what the savage animal is like is the great cause of his attractiveness in the first instance, but of course what makes him pleasant too is the practice he has had in making himself so. Even the power of

agreeableness can be very much improved by practice."

"You think that curiosity to see what has pleased and attracted another woman makes us follow each other?" she said. "Perhaps there may be a good deal in it. But then they are sure not to be dull, we are safe of that. I think the stupidest of women are too sharp to be attracted by a dull man; it is brightness which attracts the moth. One sees how women may get very fond of a dull man, —I confess myself I don't understand it,—but then it is in a different way; they don't flirt with him, it is good solid liking, they are never attracted or fascinated by him."

"No, I am afraid it is the pleasant and brilliant good-for-nothings who have the best turn among the unsuspecting," he said; "but what a little astonishes me, and amuses me not a little, is that very often one sees a very proper and righteous member of womankind very much attracted by some Lovelace. How do you account for that?"

"Curiosity, perhaps, partly again," she answered; "they want to see what on earth there can be about the man so much pleasanter

than about other men, and as they feel quite safe they go and have a peep ; and perhaps too there is a wish to reform the sinner, and their vanity is a little tickled at the idea of the triumph over his wickedness,—they hope to pluck the brand from the burning and lead him into the right path, poor dear things ! only the brand is too often much hotter than they even dreamed of, and singes them sadly ; and while the wicked man departs and goes on in his old courses, she, poor ‘thing’ ! feels the burns for many a day and forswears brands for the rest of her life.”

“ But don’t you think,” he asked, “ that these sort of men ever reform their ways, and become extremely respectable husbands and exemplary members of society ? ”

“ Well,” she answered, “ you know the old adage, and I think there is some truth in it ; if these sort of men marry, they have generally got very tired of their old trade, or find that it is failing them, and their experience of women, and a certain amount of coolness in dealing with them, helps them to choose a partner who will suit them, and then they don’t expect too much, and they fully under-

stand all the smaller attentions and little kindnesses that make a woman's life pleasant with them. Mr. St. John, if many men—if all men—would only remember that it is small attentions, small instances of thoughtfulness and affection, that endear them to women, and consideration for their weaknesses and failings, not great sacrifices and extravagant presents, there would be many more happier marriages in the world, and far fewer unhappy ones.”

“There I am quite sure you are right,” he answered, “and, of course, it is the sort of men we are talking of, whose experience enables them to see this and to use it; but, of course, the consciousness of a power of pleasing carries with it the temptation to abuse it.”

“I suppose it does,” she replied, “in the same way that a woman likes to use her powers of attracting, and to watch the progress of the victim as he comes under the influence of them. But I will confess, in spite of all that has been said, to a weakness for the naughty men,—perhaps I have a hope of reforming them. Anyhow, I know I find myself

saying of some man of adventurous antecedents, 'how very pleasant he is in spite of all the past,'—or, of some man who has made himself very agreeable before I knew anything about him, 'what a pity we should find out that such a pleasant and charming man should have been so unscrupulous where women were concerned !' "

At this moment they heard a ring at the door-bell, and Mrs. Addington said,

"I wonder who this tiresome visitor is who comes interrupting us ; it is not often any one calls so late on a day when I am not supposed to be at home."

"I am very glad," said Wilfred, "that I did not know your regular days, or I should not have come to interrupt your reading. I am afraid you must have blessed me by your gods when you heard my ring."

"Yes, and blessed you by yourself when you were announced, but we shall see who this is," she said.

The smart gentleman in plain clothes here opened the door, and announced Lady Waldermere.

“ Oh ! it's Hilda,” exclaimed Mrs. Addington ; “ I am so glad ; we were afraid that it was some obnoxious person come to interrupt us, and bore us with the usual small talk of the daily caller.”

“ Well, I'll try not to bore you, as I have interrupted you,” said Lady Waldermere ; “ was Mr. St. John in the middle of the ‘ Morte d'Arthur ’ again, or were you talking over the affairs of the age we live in ? ”

“ We were discussing when you came in,” said Mrs. Addington, “ the causes and signs of agreeableness among men, and we were trying to decide why the men with least moral character, as far as women are concerned, are so often the pleasantest.”

“ And may I ask what conclusion you arrived at ? ” said Lady Waldermere.

“ Well, I think we rather agreed that it was a fact,” she answered ; “ and we find more than one reason for it, but won't you to give us your opinion on the matter ? ”

“ My opinion ? ” said Lady Waldermere, “ I don't know that I have ever properly considered the subject. I have not generally inquired into the morals, or the past history of

every man who amuses me, and they have not often considered it necessary to enlighten me about them. I am apt to take a man as I find him and ask no questions."

"Then you don't quite agree with us that the naughty men are so often the pleasantest?" said Mrs. Addington.

"I cannot quite agree with you, if you mean that their naughtiness has any particular charm for me," she answered, "but I do think that men who have laid out for themselves, as their line in life, the pleasing of women, if at all clever to start with, are probably more agreeable than most others, practice makes perfect in that as in so many other things, but I think it is something apart from their morals or their want of them that makes them pleasant. I will not necessarily give the palm of agreeableness to the scamps of society, though they have much too good a time of it. But I am afraid women are too apt to be taken with what is on the surface; it is a pity that so many men who devote their lives to higher objects than social pleasantness should always show themselves off so badly to us."

“Still, my dear Hilda,” said Mrs. Addington, “the pleasant, social butterflies have their regular place in life, and not such a very useless one either as we find it.”

“Oh! they have their use certainly, as you say,” she answered, “so have the hairdresser, and the chiropodist—both extremely useful,—but still you cannot say that their callings are the highest the human mind is capable of.”

“Then,” said Mrs. Addington, “you look with contempt on the women who are taken by the man whose moral character is not what it should be, etc., whom we were talking of?”

“Oh! no, I don’t say that,” she answered, “but I don’t see why you should like them especially *because* they are *mauvais sujets*; there is a long distance between that and liking them because they can make themselves very agreeable. What I say is, that if they make themselves agreeable to me I don’t inquire too closely into their morals, but the absence of them does not attract me. I always thought that that was rather a phase which very young girls go through, who like

a man 'Because he is so wicked,' at the age when they are divided between the charms of the æsthetic young curate, and of the debauched old colonel with such a beautiful long silky moustache, when *les extrêmes se touchent* with a vengeance in what awakens their young affections, but I cannot allow that these ideas apply to older and more experienced women, who have seen something of the ways of the world and the devices of men."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Addington, "perhaps I am still very young, and I hope I am; but in spite of what you say, I still have my weakness, not for debauched old colonels but for the class of men we were talking about, and I hate dull men however good they are."

"So do I, goodness knows," said Lady Waldermere, "and I am sure many of the dull men envy the success, as it is called, of the others, and are kept from following their example, simply by their dulness, and by no want of will, so I mean that one must not confound the want of morals with the power of pleasing, and think that they always go together. I think that a man may be just as

pleasing without even having caused] one unhappy moment to any fair creature, but they are sadly apt to abuse their power."

"I am very glad, Lady Waldermere," said Wilfred, "to hear you stand up for the conscientious among my fellows, and not let the good-for-little have it all their own way,—I am afraid that a great many of the higher and better among men will not take the trouble to let woman see what they have in them,—but I was not born to set the world right, I am happy to say."

"Well, I think our conversation has grown rather too serious," said Mrs. Addington, "so we will leave the unfortunate race of women to fight it out as well as they can with the wicked men about, and think of how to amuse ourselves for the future. What fun we will have up in Scotland,—Oh! Mr. St. John, we want you to come up to Scotland to us in August, Hilda is coming and some of the others who were with us yesterday. I told Charley I should ask you, and he said all right, so you must be sure to come or I shall not forgive you."

Wilfred did not want asking twice, he had

heard of the charms of the Addingtons' place in the Western Highlands, and with the additional attraction of so pleasant a party he promised at once.

"I like Scotland," said Lady Waldermere, "but I have never seen the Western Highlands, and I have always heard that Glen Dhu is one of the most charming places that there is there, and that you have made the house quite a palace, Bessie."

"Well," she answered, "you know I do like to be comfortable, and I have done my best in such an outlandish place, but you will see and judge for yourselves."

"And in the meantime," said Lady Waldermere, "we will try on Sunday to settle another party together somewhere. We shall end by breaking in Mr. St. John pretty well, I hope," she added looking at him with a smile.

"I don't think you will find that he will struggle much against the breaking," he said; "he has been through several sorts of training, but never such a pleasant course as this before!"

The conversation then drifted away into

the topics of the society of the day, and after some little time Wilfred took up his hat to go.

"You can put me into my carriage," said Lady Waldermere, "for I must be running away too, so good-bye Bessie, *au revoir* on Sunday."

Wilfred went downstairs with Lady Waldermere, and saw her into a very pretty victoria with a pair of dark bay horses, and as she gave him her tiny hand to say 'Good-bye,' she said, "Don't forget that you are to come and see me, and you are to see if you can discover how I make my parties pleasant!"

He watched her driving away into the Park, and then started to walk slowly back by the Serpentine to Piccadilly. As he strolled through the beautiful Park, his thoughts naturally turned to the two ladies he had just left. He could not help thinking what a kindness of fortune it was to him, his chance meeting such a few days back, at a not intimate friend's house, with Lady Waldermere, which had led to his so pleasantly begun acquaintance with her, and his admission into such a very agreeable little *coterie*.

The contrast between the three ladies, of whom it seemed probable that he would see so much, was very amusing. Mrs. Henderson, whom he had known so well, and whose good qualities and little weaknesses he was so well acquainted with, was a very good foil to the other two more brilliant friends of hers, and he felt that she would always be a sort of pleasant completion to the group, but his interest was engaged in the other two, who were both of them not only unusually good-looking, but unusually bright and amusing, if not really clever and brilliant; and all this he hoped that the future would disclose to him. He was then in London with nothing on earth to do but to amuse himself, and what better could he do than take the good the gods provided for him, and enjoy to the utmost the pleasant society he found himself in. He had no particularly intimate friend among women, and was without any sort of flirtation or *liaison* going on, so he thought he might just as well amuse himself by studying the characters of these two women. Mrs. Addington was evidently the easiest to become intimate with; and he saw that she

was amused by his society, and ready to give him a chance of giving her a great deal more of it. He had no doubt that as he went on he should find it even pleasanter, but with the other lady he had his doubts as to how far he should get; there seemed, judging from the little he had seen, to be in her a sort of barrier beyond which no one passed; she was either all surface, with a great power of showing it off, or she had that brilliant surface, and, underneath it, depths which he did not flatter himself he should ever succeed in fathoming; but it would be interesting to convince himself that there were those depths, and he felt no doubt that in time he should learn that. He thought that he saw more or less what the character of Mrs. Addington was, but that of Lady Waldermere was a very different thing; and while he had a sort of easy security already about his position with Mrs. Addington, he felt a doubt if after weeks of acquaintance, he should even then arrive at the same feeling of familiarity with her.

As for what the world calls flirting, with either of the ladies, it did not enter his head;

all he felt was a desire for the pleasantest society he could get, and theirs seemed to offer it. He had very little personal vanity, and it never occurred to him that any one was likely to care much for him. He was aware that such a thing was *possible*, and that in other scenes and other days deep love had been lavished on him, but the grave had long since closed over those days, and had left him no feeling of that belief in his charms which some men go through the world so confidently with. He felt fully convinced of the impossibility of his falling in love with any one, and he was equally sceptical of any one's doing so with him; and he considered in a vague sort of way that nature and chance had just fitted him to avail himself of his present opportunity of leading a very pleasant life. He had heard that Charley Addington had good fishing and deer stalking in a beautiful country, and one of the most luxurious houses in Scotland, so that he had quite fallen on his legs in the chance of a month there. After all, the world was not such a bad place; and though he had had to experience many of the bad turns of the wheel of fortune, there

seemed to be balm in Gilead yet ;—if he could not be successful in the greater things of life, at least let him enjoy the smaller things ; and since trifles make the sum of human things, he quite resolved for the next two or three months, to forswear the more serious side of life and quietly enjoy its pleasures.

Such were his thoughts as he walked under the shady elms, past the masses of flowers and tropical plants freshly planted out from Kew, which make such a fair garden of the Park, and he could not remember when he had walked down there with such a light feeling at his heart, and such a belief in the pleasantness of the world.

CHAPTER V.

To any man who agrees with Pope as to what the proper study of mankind is, there are few things more amusing than to watch the effect of a few years on some one whom one of us has known very intimately, and has lost sight of for some time.

Wilfred St. John was quite of this opinion as he was giving the last twist to his white tie on Sunday evening, and was looking out a white waistcoat wherewith he meant to do honour to a very warm evening, which had not been ironed by the lady who did his washing, as though it was intended for a portly gentleman of seventeen stone. He had known Charley Addington very well in days gone-by when

he was a young man about London, with a very good income, and more to come; and when he was setting himself resolutely to enjoy all that good birth, good fortune, and good health could give a man of five-and-twenty. His was one of the brass vessels that Wilfred had floated down the river with, till the cracks in his poor earthenware sides had reminded him so painfully that he was not born to ten thousand a year; and since then he had only met him by chance on his visits to England. With very fair abilities, a good deal of ready wit, and a recklessness that would have honoured a man from county Galway, he had in those days been a most cheery companion, and had divided his energies between courting the favours of the fair sex, and of the blind goddess, till apparently both had lost their charms, and he had plunged into matrimony and politics. Whether the charms of the fair Bessie had 'knocked him all of a heap,' or whether he had made up his mind to marry, and had then selected that interesting maiden and laid regular siege to her, Wilfred was not sure; but he was now much interested to see what

the *ménage* was like between two people, one of whom he had known so well years ago, and the other in whose way chance had thrown him so much in a few days, that he felt as if he knew her intimately already.

It was with these feelings and the expectation of meeting a pleasant party, and the not doubtful blessing of a good dinner in prospect, that he descended from the gondola of the modern Babylon, and rang at the door-bell of the Addingtons' house in Princes Gate.

Addington welcomed him most pleasantly to his home, and Wilfred did not see much change in his old companion beyond a thinness in the 'clustering locks upon his brow,' and a tendency to put on weight which his own more irregular and less prosperous way of life had quite checked.

It was quite evident that hospitality was one of the pleasures of his life, and that at any rate in this he had got a partner whom he agreed with. But it was amusing to a man who remembered the very free and easy manner of his younger days, to see him transformed into quite a formal master of the house.

“ Well, Wilfred,” he said, “ I’m very glad to see you after so many years; my wife told me that she had met you, and it seems she has added you to her list; you will find you have enough to do before she has done with you ! ”

Wilfred was rather amused at Addington’s way of beginning his remarks on his acquaintance with his wife, but he remembered his plain speaking of old, and was not a bit surprised at it, and he replied,

“ For my part I must congratulate you on having chosen your partner in life with such excellent taste; it makes me quite envious to see my old friends with such charming companions to bless their domesticity.”

“ So I have heard, my dear Wilfred,” said Charley, laughing, “ and that envy of the happiness of some of your married friends has been a weakness which has befallen you once or twice in your life.”

“ What is Charley saying to you, Mr. St. John, about the weaknesses of your past life ? ” said Mrs. Addington coming up to them.

“ He is beginning to take a base advantage of having known me so well in my more

innocent days," said Wilfred, "but he must remember that there are such possibilities as reprisals,"

"There I defy you," said Charley Addington, "my wife knows all about my past life so well that it don't matter what you say. I don't know how she managed it, but she knows sometimes more about it than I do myself."

"And a very edifying study I found it, I assure you, Mr. St. John," said the lady; "it would rather startle some innocent damsels if they knew what a piece of iniquity they were engaged to, instead of the spotless specimens of chivalry that in their imagination they see kneeling at their feet."

"Well, Bessie, you may say what you like, but, however sinful we have been, we don't make such bad husbands, and your innocent damsel very often knows a deal more than the kneeling gentleman ever supposes; it's as often as not six for one and half-a-dozen for the other, besides she don't want a muff for a husband, and nine out of ten of the men who have always been so very correct, have been so because they have been too slow to be anything else."

“At any rate, Charley,” said Wilfred, “no one will accuse you of slowness, or of being a muff, so you had a good deal to recommend you as a husband. Oh! here comes Mrs. Henderson,” he said, as that lady was shown into the room. “What sort of husband is she waiting for, do you think?”

“Why, I should think you would do very well,” said Charley, laughing. “Don’t you think, Bessie, he would just do? Let’s marry him to the plump widow, that is as soon as you have done with him; I know you won’t let him go before.”

“Charley, you had better go and talk to her, and not talk nonsense,” said his wife, stepping forward to welcome the lady.

The whole party had in a few minutes all arrived; they consisted of the same half-dozen who had been to Maidenhead together, and with the addition of Sir Henry Waldermere, a pretty Miss Featherstone, who was a *protégé* of Mrs. Addington, and a Mrs. Macdonald, whose husband, a colonel of that clan, was detained at Aldershot by military duties, made up a party of ten. Mrs. Addington considered that ten people and a round table was a very

pleasant number, because if they know each other well the conversation could be general, or if each one liked to talk to their neighbour, there were enough to make it possible without every one at the table hearing every word that was said.

It fell to Wilfred's lot to take in Miss Featherstone, and he found himself with Lady Waldermere on the other side of him.

Wilfred was one of those men who had rather the feelings of a Frenchman when placed next some blushing virgin just emerging into the gay world; the freshness of the *jeune* 'Mees' had no great charm for him, he always felt some difficulty in knowing what on earth to talk to her about, and had so used himself to the society of older women, and of married ones by choice, that he was rather like a fish out of water with a very young girl, and he had not arrived at all near the age when extreme youth begins to have such a charm for approaching senility. He had been a little startled since his return to England to find the rapid strides that the young unmarried women of London had made in their endeavours to copy their more fortunate and more ad-

vanced married sisters, but he had not yet brought himself to take a pleasure in telling stories, and repeating bits of scandal to girls of nineteen and twenty, with which he would have had some hesitation in amusing the well used ears of a dowager far on the shady side of fifty.

He did all that he thought civility towards Miss Featherstone required, and the considerable share of prettiness that nature had blessed her with was by no means without its charms, and he was quite of the opinion that if a woman cannot be amusing, she does at any rate something towards agreeableness if she is pleasant to look at. But his attention was fully occupied by his other neighbour, and the party was of a size, and made up of a company, that often made the conversation general. Frank Digby had a voice of a capacity to be well heard, and took a pleasure in making it; so that ensured there being no awful pauses, while Charley Addington brought out his remarks and jokes quite regardless of the company, but with a *bonhomie* and naturalness that made it impossible for any woman to feel injured, or even shocked.

There had been a little conversation about the party on the river, and all had agreed what a success it had been, when Charley Addington said to Sir Percy, who was sitting by his wife at the other side of the table,

“Fitzroy, I hear you don’t encourage husbands to come to parties of that kind, do you think that when a man marries he ought to forswear amusing himself?”

“On the contrary,” answered Sir Percy, “whenever I have had anything to do with arranging parties like ours of last Thursday, I make a point of asking married men, but I find that somehow their engagements seldom admit of their coming if their wives are to be of the party. I have been down to parties on the river, and to things of that sort often enough, with married men, but I must say that it is comparatively seldom that their own wives have been the object of attraction, but it would be a sight that I should be charmed to see, a husband of some years’ standing punting his wife about.”

“And do you find that the distaste for it comes from the husband or the wife’s side?” he asked.

“Never having been married,” answered Sir Percy, “I really cannot pretend to say, but my own idea is that they generally are much of the same opinion on the subject.”

“I quite agree with you, Fitzroy,” said Frank Digby; “there are very few who do not like a little change of idea now and then; neither man nor woman can always feed on partridge, however plump it may be, and I always think that they ought to go back to ‘Mons. le Mari’ and ‘Madame la Femine’ with all the more pleasure that they have seen a contrast, and proved the wisdom of their choice in the partners of their life by it. I always think it argues a terrible mistrust of his own powers of pleasing his wife, and a fear of the contrast, when I see a man so unwilling to let his wife be for a short time in other company than his own; as for the people who think that because a woman has done them the honour to marry them, she must forswear all further enjoyment of life, why they are fit for no more civilized society than that of Turks, and not to trust a woman to amuse herself without them at her elbow, seems to me to be the best encouragement that they can give her to play the fool.”

“Then you think, Digby,” said Addington, “that a man ought to give his wife as much liberty as ever as she wants?”

“I think,” he answered, “that if he does not choose to give her a reasonable amount, she is pretty sure to take it; to mistrust her is to defy her, and I have enough experience of women to know that if a man’s wife means to deceive him in anything, she is sure to do it whatever he may do to the contrary; their wits are far sharper than ours. I always look on with a smile of pity when I see a man trying to look so sharp after his wife. He had far better trust her; she is much less likely to do anything he does not like, and then if she does after all, he will have the satisfaction of feeling that he has really a right to reproach her, instead of merely feeling that he is outwitted and made a fool of.”

“Quite right, Mr. Digby,” said Mrs. Addington; “you know something about us at any rate, and you have found that if men choose to treat us as inferior creatures, we are pretty sure to revenge ourselves by proving the superiority of our wits. What more contemptible sight is there to men than that of a man

looked after so sharp by his wife, why then should it not be an equally contemptible sight to them to see a wife looked after by a man? It is to women, for they know what a fool she can make of him at any moment, and very often does."

"But," said Sir Percy, "I can help you to the man who is the greatest fool of the lot, and that is the man who has fits of mistrust and confidence—he is sure to come to grief; for he so thoroughly demoralises all a woman's ideas of trust and honour by his periods of distrust, that she only looks upon his trusting intervals as the symptoms of imbecility.

" 'Then trust me not at all, or all in all! ' " said Mrs. Henderson. "You quite agree with the poet, Sir Percy, and I as a woman entirely agree with you. I am sure that there are a number of people very unhappy, to whom life might be very enjoyable if it had not been for their own faults; a woman is never bad naturally, and I don't believe one-half of the evil that is talked about them."

"You certainly, Mrs. Henderson," said Sir Percy, "have a large share of the charity that thinketh no evil; and I think that you are on

the right side ; certainly, the pleasantest and happiest one."

" Well, if every woman was like Mrs. Henderson," said Addington, " there would be no need of jealous or suspicious husbands."

" No, my dear Charley," said his wife, " if we were all widows there certainly would not ; but, unfortunately, some of us have not that advantage."

" You know what I meant, Bessie," said Addington, as every one laughed ; and he added, in his peculiar manner of pretence at being annoyed, " I have no doubt that many of you only wish you had the good luck, but I mean to stay some time yet to annoy you, I can tell you."

" Hilda," said Mrs. Addington, " you are nearer to him than I am, can't you keep him in order ? "

" What do you think, Mr. Addington," said Lady Waldermere, " of the proof of devotion I am going to suggest, not to you, but to the man it would apply to ? You have all read ' Enoch Arden,' how the supposed dead husband comes back to find his wife happy

with another husband, and is good natured enough to leave her alone in her happiness. But what should you think of the self-devotion of a man who knew his wife was unhappy with him, and might be most happy with someone else, and out of pure kindheartedness relieved her of his presence, as there is no other way of freeing her? Would you not call that devotion?"

"I fear that no ill-mated husbands are quite disinterested enough to do that," said Frank Digby. "I am sure that if the prayers and good wishes of the happy couple he had left could give him a short time in purgatory, he would escape with a very slight singeing. Men often talk of dying for a woman; but I don't think many of them would care to do it in that way."

"I am afraid that you would find," said Sir Percy, "no Turk, with sufficient faith in the chances of the houris of the future state, to voluntarily give up the certainty of those he had got here, merely to please them, however distasteful his presence might be to them; and I am sure, in this land, that married men believe so firmly in the divine right of hus-

bands, that they would feel it their duty to live on if only to spite their wives. I am afraid that the world has but little sympathy for the woman in an ill-assorted union."

"Do you think it has so much for the husband?" asked Charley Addington. "It has always seemed to me that the husband has been a fair subject for a joke from the time of Potiphar down to the plays of the Restoration. Precious little sympathy for him; nothing but unseemly jokes. What do you think, Waldermere?" he added, turning to Sir Henry.

"I think," said Sir Henry, who could never admit the possibility of a man in his position appearing in an undignified light, "that so long as a man behaves in a proper and dignified way, the world will never find anything to laugh at in him."

"The world sometimes takes the bull by the horns," said Charley Addington, who couldn't resist any attempt at a joke, "and does what it shouldn't; and I fear that I can't quite agree with you that the dignity of a man can quite save him from ridicule, and I am sorry to say, for the profanity of the world,

that it even at times seems to give an additional incitement to its mirth."

"I still think that you view it in the wrong light," said Sir Henry, "and that it is a man's own fault if he appears ridiculous."

"I quite agree with you, Henry," said his wife; "for I think it is a man's own fault if his wife ever causes him to appear ridiculous. We are not fond of being the wives of ridiculous men."

"Very well said, Hilda," cried Mrs. Ad-dington. "But you will find it rather hard to persuade them all of that. They are very fond of abusing us, but they are not at all fond of looking at home. I think that the idea of the mote and the beam will apply uncommonly well to many a husband and wife."

"For my part," said Mrs. Henderson, "I cannot see why they should not all get on well together, if they would only have a little more consideration on both sides. I am sure that they all might."

"Then, you think, Mrs. Henderson," said Wilfred, who had so far been a silent listener to the discussion, "that if so many men and

so many women were shaken up in two bags, and taken out by chance, that it would be entirely their own fault if they did not all get on together?"

"No; I don't quite say that," she answered, "for no one, at least in England, is forced to marry."

"Strongish compulsion now and then, my dear lady," he answered; "but when there is none, people often marry, and, from youth or slight acquaintance, know as little really of one another as if they had been shaken by chance out of a bag; do you think that a little consideration would make some of these hopelessly unsuitable couples love each other?"

"You are putting extreme cases, Mr. St. John," she answered, "and I am only talking of the greater number of marriages."

"In a very large number of marriages," he replied, "people are so hopelessly uninteresting and characterless that I don't think it matters who they are tied to, and they shake along together because they have not sense enough to see the defects or objection to the others. I always think that the obtuse and thick-skinned people in the world are to be

envied; but it is of the sensitive ones that I am thinking and speaking, and it is those that no amount of consideration could make love where no love was. Get on together it does make them, as such numbers of people who are really very uncomfortable, but who make a very good show to the world, give evidence of; and if, by getting on well together, you mean that, I think you are fairly right; but if you mean love each other, I am afraid that you must prepare a more potent philtre than considerateness."

"Well, I still think that many people make their own unhappiness," said Mrs. Henderson; "and if they would make up their minds a little sooner, that they have taken their partner for better or for worse, they would be more contented."

"I quite agree with you," said Frank Digby, "that they make their own unhappiness; but I think that the 'little sooner' should be before they make interested and foolish marriages; and as for taking for better and for worse, the day will come, though I shall not live to see it I am afraid, when the world will be sensible enough to find some

other way of arranging the social relations of man and woman, without this senseless tie which it is supposed to be a disgrace to sever, instead of very often the wisest thing they could do."

"Now, Mr. Digby," said Mrs. Henderson, "I won't have you talk 'like that. I know you don't mean it; and marriage is such a sacred and solemn thing that I won't listen to your talking so lightly of it."

"Then, my dear madame," said Digby, turning and making a sort of bow to her, "I will promise in future, in your presence, to speak of the holy state with the proper respect due to it."

"Yes," she said, "and I hope you will out of it too. You don't know the ideas that your words, spoken so lightly about it, may awake in the breasts of weak and foolish people."

"But I really never converse with weak and foolish people, I assure you," he answered; "but still, in case I may ever be talking to a fool, and mistake him for a wise man, I will remember your warning."

"Still you must own, Mrs. Henderson," said Charley Addington, "that if we were

beginning to arrange our social matters over again, a proposal to make it possible to tie two people together for life would be received with derision."

"I am not so sure of that," she answered; "but that is not a point from which you can look at it. We know that since Adam and Eve it has been so, and was ordered to be so, and so you cannot talk of making social arrangements."

"Well," said Addington, "it seems to me that with Adam there was very little possibility of a choice. There was but one woman, and take her or leave her, there was no other; and no one for her to go to if she left him; and she, poor woman, never had a chance of vexing him by flirting. Some of your good ladies of the present day would have thought it dullish work."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Henderson, "because her husband must have been doubly attentive to her, and I am sure I cannot fancy any pleasanter life than to have a husband always attentive; he is naturally the man a woman likes best in the world."

"Only unnaturally enough he very often is

not," said Charley, "but I bet you they found something to squabble about; I dare say she called him a fool for the names he gave some of the animals."

"Oh! you, Mr. Addington," she answered, "would make a joke about anything, but I believe they were excellent husbands in early days."

"I have no doubt that you have the best authority for your belief," he said, "but you see, though Adam of necessity was what the scientific men call a monogamist, his children took to a plurality of wives as soon as they had the chance. I don't think that would have suited you at all, in the way of an excellent husband."

"I can never make you serious," she answered; "I have no doubt that if I had lived in the days when men had several wives, I should have been quite content with the arrangement."

"A great deal more than I ever should have been," said Mrs. Addington; "it was only by shutting the unfortunate creatures up and not letting them learn even to read or write, that they got them to be such fools or

to submit to it. Well, we've changed all that; who knows what more changes the world may live to see?"

"Ah! who knows?" said Frank Digby. "Mrs. Addington, if only all the world had our advancement of ideas, what a paradise we could make of it?"

"When there would be no more marrying and giving in marriage, I suppose, to begin with," said Charley Addington. "Well well, my dear, we have not arrived at that yet, so we must go on putting up with one another as well as we can."

The discussion about social laws, and the agreement or disagreement of husbands and wives, gradually came to an end, and the conversation did not become general again till the ladies retired. Wilfred turned to Lady Waldermere, and said, "You did not give us your opinion on the point in discussion, about the happiness and unhappiness of husbands and wives, Lady Waldermere."

"No," she answered, "it is a sort of subject in which I prefer to listen, rather than to talk. I am not very fond of putting it into anyone's power to be able even to say, 'oh! I know

what you think, for you told us so and so,' still less do I wish any one to go away and quote my opinion, gathered from a few chance words dropped in a conversation like that."

"Then you have an opinion you could give if you like"? he asked.

"Yes, Mr. St. John," she answered, "I have an opinion most certainly. You can hardly suppose that I have been married nearly ten years, and have no opinion upon married life; but I must tell you, without wishing to appear to snub you, that it is an opinion that I keep exclusively to myself."

"I accept my rebuke humbly," he answered, "and I feel that it was rather a piece of impertinence in me to try to get it out of you, after the short acquaintance I have had the pleasure of; but you know with what freedom most women are ready to air their opinions, and I am sure you will pardon me accordingly."

"I don't think your offence requires any pardon," she said, smiling, "and I know that the greater number of women you meet would give you a long lecture about husbands and wives, but I have peculiarities about me, as you will find out if you choose to take the

trouble, and not to give my opinion on certain subjects is one of them, but I don't in the least mind any one asking it."

"There are many women" he replied, "as you say, Lady Waldermere, who would give a long enough lecture, but a lecture is by no means necessarily an opinion. I always think that a large part of the community never have an opinion. We know that many have no ideas, and merely repeat just what others have thought out for them. As an opinion is an advancement upon ideas, I don't see how they can have it. I always think that an original opinion is as rare as it is interesting to meet with. Opinions are so nearly always borrowed, and too often without even knowing the ideas that led to such opinions being formed."

"Then, are you against teaching people any fixed opinions?" she asked.

"Oh! no; I don't go so far as that, because of course you must to children teach actual things, that is, opinions that have been formed, but I think it a great mistake later on not to try more to teach them how those opinions were formed. I am not speaking now of

religion, because in that the Church is supposed to have come to conclusions, and it is supposed not to be in the least necessary to know how they ever came to them, and they must be accepted as certain before the proof of them is studied. But in matters social and political, I think, that as people grow older, if they have any wits, it would be better to encourage them much more to find out the reasons for the opinions they hold, that is, the chain of ideas which has led to certain conclusions."

"Perhaps you may be right," she said, "but don't you think it would lead to far more speculation than we have even now, and would encourage all sorts of wild opinions and theories?"

"But that is what I rather prefer to encourage," he answered, "the tendency of the present day is to discourage all originality; people are taught to run in such a groove, and grooviness is the greatest cold blanket to efforts of genius that there can possibly be. I think people make such a mistake in teaching, between a proper training of the mind to struggle with life and its subjects, and the

actual hammering in of fixed ideas on those subjects. The state of mind that can make discoveries, and strike out new ideas, is that of being able to grasp all the ideas which there have been on the subjects, without having any one conclusion so hopelessly drummed into it as to hamper the mind in working."

"Do you think the results would be so much for the benefit of mankind then," said she, "if you did have more people endeavouring to solve all these difficulties that we feel perpetually round us?"

"I certainly think that any discovery, whether physical or intellectual, is for the good and for the advancement of mankind, but of course physical science is different to things that are abstract; the one is tangible, and fixed ideas are only fixed till they have been pushed on by further research in the subject the results of which can tangibly be verified; the other is different, and of course anything in the shape of speculative philosophy is very apt to wander away into chaos, though I don't think that it need always, but it seems to me so hard, so to speak, to put one's self outside any subject. Perhaps I may

a little explain what I mean by an idea I have often had, that sounds a little ludicrous, but I often long to be able to put myself *outside* the world, to feel as if I were a few miles from the surface of the earth, and watching men in the sort of way we can watch an ant's nest, or a beehive by putting a pane of glass in the side of it. I always feel as though the most profound thinker was too much mixed up in the world to be able to abstract himself enough to form a really dispassionate opinion upon his fellow-men, and that it is such a pity no Queen Mab can take us up with Ianthe, and explain to us about the world, and all that occupies man so much, and which he understands so little."

"Yes, it would be pleasant," she answered. "I suppose we must nearly all of us have had at times longings to penetrate a little deeper than we have yet managed to do, but I thought, Mr. St. John, that you were much more of a practical man; I had no idea you were so speculative and imaginative. Mrs. Henderson did not give me that idea of you at all."

"But I don't think I have any right to be

thought imaginative," said he, "for I have only been expressing the wish to know, and that is very different to having any power of imagination. I don't think, you know, that Mrs. Henderson cares much about speculative ideas of any sort; she thinks that what is, is, and what is, is right,—not a bad doctrine by any means to go through the world with, and saves a lot of worrying thought."

"Do you think so many people's thoughts do worry them?" she asked.

"I think that that is most hard to say," he answered; "one finds that people do think whom one would least expect it of, and others, who seem thoughtful, who never have anything in the least interesting pass through their minds; but we have to know people so well before we have any real idea what their mind is like, that we end by knowing it of very few indeed. One finds sometimes a side of it in some one whom we have lived with intimately for years, and which they have concealed so carefully that we have never seen it."

"And you think that the lady opposite us has not fathomed all that is in yours; is that a little what you mean?" she asked.

“Well,” said Wilfred, laughing, “to descend from the high region in which I have been discussing with you so very long-windedly, perhaps we might say so, though I rather doubt its depth being worth much trouble to fathom.”

“Shall I tell you in a year how far I have fathomed?” she asked, laughing; “let me see, next June. I wonder if we shall remember it; you must remind me, and we will see if I have found any very unexpected depths in that time.”

“I wish I could think that you would do anything so pleasant as to take the trouble to find out. I will promise to give you every facility in the process,” he replied.

“We will see,” she said. “I shall see something more of you here if you choose to come and see me, and then we shall have some time together in Scotland. Or, I may find out all about you, fathom you down to the very bottom before then, if you are not very discreet.”

“I am afraid you must have found out this evening,” he said, as Mrs. Addington was giving the mysterious signal to the ladies to depart, “that I can be terribly prosy.”

“That I will tell you at the end of your year,” she said, laughing. “I am not going to give you your character piecemeal; you shall have it in a lump then if you care to. Now I leave you to study the baser sex for a while.”

Charley Addington was not a man who considered it necessary to sit for a certain long prosy interval after the ladies had gone, and he was of the school who believe in drinking as much wine as every one likes at dinner, and going to the welcome cigarette as soon as the fair creatures have taken themselves off, so that the time for cigarette and coffee was rarely more than a quarter of an hour. On this occasion Mrs. Addington sent in in a few minutes to say that as it was so warm they were going to have coffee outside in a place that she had cunningly arranged, overlooking the garden, for such occasions; and that, unless they had anything very interesting to discuss, they might come and smoke a cigarette with the ladies. They were all ready enough for this, and adjourned at once to fresh air, even though mixed a little with London blacks.

“What a delightful country this would be,”

said Mrs. Henderson, when they were all seated about on "the most luxurious of chairs and cushions, "if we could only always have a climate like this, but I am afraid that we should then never make our houses so comfortable, and I do like to see rooms look as though they were intended to be lived in."

"I agree with you," said Wilfred, "and many as are the charms of warm climates, I do like a nice fireside sometimes; and I am one of those people who think that the climate of a country, and the particular habits it entails on the inhabitants of it, has a wonderful effect on their character."

"Do you agree with Kingsley, then," said Digby, "that it is the nice north-east wind that makes us such a great nation?"

"Happily that is only one part of our climate," said Wilfred, "but I am a little inclined, with M. Taine, to think that the chilliness of it has very much to do with making us so domestic."

"Are you domestic, then, Mr. St. John?" said Mrs. Henderson. "I should have thought that, to judge from your past life, you were just the contrary."

"But I've never had the chance of being," he answered. "I assure you nature made me for the most domestic of mankind. Don't you think, Digby, that it's very bad that men like you and I, who have so much of the gray-malkin in us, should have had to do such violence to our feelings and stray away?"

"Yes," said he. "Now I am just made to sit by the peaceful hearth, and be stroked and purr."

"Much more at home on the tiles, I think," said Charley Addington, who was sitting near, and heard what they were saying. "I never saw two men who have led the sort of lives you two have, but what they would always try to persuade you that they had been all along doing violence to their inclinations. Mrs. Henderson, you are too clever to be taken in, I am sure. All this talk is merely part of their stock in trade; what is to prevent them trying the pleasures of the domestic hearth they talk so much about?"

"Don't listen to him, Mrs. Henderson," said Digby; "you know that we really feel what we say. Now don't you really believe

that I should make the most domestic of husbands?"

"I daresay you would," she answered. "I don't believe that you are at all so bad as you are very glad of making yourself out. Mr. St. John has been such a regular Bohemian that it is not so easy to say how he would stand being caged."

"Very well he would stand it, I assure you," said Wilfred, "if he only had the right keeper to take care of him and feed him."

They sat for a long time in the open air talking and laughing, in the growing darkness. which a very deeply shaded lamp did little to destroy. and Frank Digby was blessed with such a power of discourse that Wilfred was able to sit silent, which he felt rather disposed to do. He was watching Mrs. Addington and Lady Waldermere; to the former Sir Henry Waldermere had attached himself, and was making himself agreeable in rather a solemn way, while Sir Percy Fitzroy had seated himself almost at the feet of the latter, and had assumed the same sort of air of taking possession of her

that Wilfred had observed at their river party. The people present amused and interested him, and he felt this evening very peculiarly the charm of returning to the society of his own countrywomen, and of the particular few that he found himself with.

At last they moved into the drawing-room, and after a little more conversation the various guests departed. •

CHAPTER VI.

LADY WALDERMERE had told Wilfred, as she was wishing him good-night at the Addingtons', that she should be at home to luncheon the following day, if he cared to look in and see her feeding her small creatures. So at half-past one the next morning he left the gay crowd in the Park, and found his way to her house in Park Lane.

He was shown into the large dining-room, which looked delightfully cool and quiet, after the dusty glare and heat outside, and found Lady Waldermere looking the perfection of pretty freshness, with her two little girls sitting one on each side of her at their dinner, and a well-shaved and curled black poodle

sitting on a chair opposite, who saluted him with a short low bark as he came in, and then looked very much ashamed of having done it, but as though the temptation to speak was irresistible.

“I am so glad you have come,” said Lady Waldermere, giving him her hand as he came up to her; “now I can introduce you to my two daughters. Miss Florence and Miss Hilda Waldermere.”

“And to my Brebis, mamma, you musn’t forget Brebis,” said little Hilda, the youngest of the two.

“Brebis took care I should not forget her,” said Wilfred, “for she was the first to speak to me when I came in. How deliciously cool you are in here, Lady Waldermere, and your hall smells like a rose garden on a June morning.”

“If I have a weakness,” she answered, “it is for flowers, I think it almost impossible to have too many of them; it is my chief extravagance.”

“I was so struck by your flowers the other night,” he said, “it is so seldom that people ever have enough. I do so like those masses

of roses, they look as though one would like to go and roll in them, and they make the hottest room seem fresh."

"Yes," she said, "I do like whole piles of them. I always admire the taste of the old Roman Emperors who had such heaps of them, though I could have dispensed with the crown. Fancy if Charley Addington had worn a crown of white roses at his table last night!"

"Custom and fashion," he answered; "I should look rather curious if I could suddenly show myself in the midst of an imperial party of those days in that most hideous and unnatural garment, a jacket with tails, which fashion obliges me to wear if I go into civilised society in the evening now. A purple robe over a white toga was far more dignified, and comfortable enough when you were used to it. How do you like the Addingtons' house, Lady Waldermere?"

"I think it very pretty," she answered, "and it is delightful to have it open on both sides; of course we have the Park here, but we have no garden at the back like them."

"Still I so infinitely prefer Mayfair to Princes Gate," he said; "no amount of air

could make up to me for the loss of your situation here. I had never been in their house till the other afternoon when I met you there."

"I thought Charley Addington was an old friend of yours," she said; "had you not seen him for so long?"

"Never since he married," he answered, "and I only met his wife for the first time at your house. I like her, she seems very bright and pleasant, have you known her long?"

"Oh! yes," she replied. "I have known her to speak to for three or four years, but only well since last summer, when we made up a few parties together, and they came and stayed with us. I suppose you knew him well in days gone by?"

"Yes," he said, "very well, he was never what you call an intimate friend of mine, but for a year or two we were very much in the same set, and leading much the same sort of life, but he what they call stayed the longest. A poor man is too heavily weighted, Lady Waldermere, if he tries to live with men so far richer than himself, but, it is naturally a temptation, and one so often sees that the man

with next to nothing has far more go in him, and really enjoys life much more than the rich man. Every rich man ought to have been poor to know the pleasures of being rich."

"Yes," said Lady Waldermere, "people may say what they will, and philosophise as much as they like, but it *is* very nice to be rich. People talk such nonsense about being fond of money; it isn't having money that is nice, it is the delightful command of everything that it gives you."

"Of course it is," he answered, "only fools like money for its own sake, but I do like to see people spend it well when they have got it; some seem to spend such a lot and to get nothing for it, and others are afraid to spend anything, or have some little meanness which destroys half the comfort of their life."

"I don't think any one can accuse our friends the Addingtons of little meannesses," said Lady Waldermere. "I will say for Mrs. Addington that she does do her utmost to make her home nice, and to make her friends comfortable; their house in the country is really pleasant to stay at, and I am told that

up in Scotland she has transformed a shooting lodge into a palace."

"I was very much amused last night," said Wilfred, "to see Charley Addington for the first time as a married man; he seemed at first to be altered, but his old self very soon came out; it would have been hard to say from what he said and did last night, how he really gets on with his wife; he always had that rather rough way of plain speaking, so it does not follow that he means half he says in the sense it sounds. Haven't you found that at times he comes out with some very startling things?"

"Yes, I certainly have," she answered; "he quite considers himself as one of those people who have the license to say what they like before any company. It's very curious, how, if a man chooses to assume it, the world lets him say things, and laughs at them, which it would not tolerate from some one who only ventures on it now and then."

"Only another instance of the triumph of impudence," said Wilfred; "I think you must have observed the success of that, Lady Waldermere? a little modest assurance is

a fine thing to get through the world with."

"Well, it is preferable to shyness," she answered, "or, as a shy man's friends generally call it, an excess of modesty. I can always repress a man who is too forward, but to encourage the shy one is very hard work, and scarcely repays the trouble. Modesty is a virtue which the world is always praising when it is absent, and always looking upon with a feeling of contempt when it sees it."

"I don't know what your experience may be," said he, "but excess of modesty does not seem to me to be the failing of the rising youth about London; what I should say is their besetting sin is bumptiousness. They always try it on with men older than themselves, till they set them down, which I am happy to say a great many do, but it seems to me that women allow it to the most extraordinary extent."

"I don't think that I have a very great experience of very young men," she answered. "I fancy that they are a little afraid of me, and I have not yet arrived at the time of life when I prefer them."

"Do you think that you ever will, Lady Waldermere?" he said. "Do you think all women arrive at that stage?"

"I see so many who do," she answered. "I don't know why I am to expect to be exempt from the various stages most of us seem to go through."

"In the same way," said he, "that men go through them; it is very curious. A boy is generally in love with a contemporary of his mother, if not older, and he gradually reduces the age of his love nearer and nearer to his own. Then he arrives at what I should call the most reasonable period when he likes a woman very near his own age, that is, I see all really sensible men do; but that passes, and as he approaches senility, his fancy wanders back to extreme youth, and you so very often see the oldest and most white headed old gentleman at a party, making a sort of love to the youngest damsel in the room."

"You think they don't at all see why crabbed age and youth cannot live together?" she said.

"No, age doesn't see it, but youth does very plainly," he answered. "Age does *not*

always bring wisdom ; if a man begins life with a prejudice, or a false idea, and never sees his mistake, age will make them part of his existence, and exaggerate them tenfold."

"What a pity it is," said she, "that age cannot have its experience, and the quickness and imagination of youth as well. Imagination seems so often to die out with years. I think nearly all the great poets have been young, certainly those of imagination ; and when some of those, who have written so well when young, have tried their hands in later life, the result has been but too often disastrous ; fortunately for their reputation, so many great poets have been gathered young. Truly, they have often illustrated the words of that unknown Greek about those whom the gods love."

"Yes," he said, "it does seem as' though experience destroyed imagination ; do you think it is that it shows how impossible the fulfilment of its dreams are, and so makes it impossible to dream any more?"

"Should you say impossible?" she answered. "I should rather say, how very rare ! Do you think that the dreams of the imagination of youth are never fulfilled?"

“I think,” said Wilfred, “that it is so rare, that to the general world you may call it never; but then I am speaking of the really imaginative, who consequently put their dreams of happiness very high. Every one believes that they have the power of imagining and dreaming of the future, and so all have to a degree, but there is an enormous difference between their powers; some people are naturally intensely practical, and their dreams of life are very frequently fulfilled; others are so vague that they don’t really know what they want, and their imagining assumes more a sort of general discontent than anything else, but no one can deny that there are people who have ideal conceptions which are *possible* of fulfilment, but which most rarely are fulfilled. As an instance, I have always thought that, as far as we know it, Shelley’s life with Mary Godwin was an ideal dream fulfilled.”

“Well then, you see, you confess, Mr. St. John,” she replied, “that the dreams you were talking of have been fulfilled in one instance, so that is an encouragement, and a gleam of hope to the other dreamers. The knowledge that *one* has succeeded in getting into Paradise seems to bring it much nearer to the others.”

“Do you think that there is any real ground for what is so often said, when people wish for something that they cannot attain to, ‘Oh! if they had it they would not be happy,’ implying that, according to their idea, happiness is impossible?” asked Wilfred.

“I think,” she answered, “that it only applies to people who are unreasonable, or who have not much sense; I don’t think it applies to the sort of people whose chances of perfecting their happiness we are discussing. Those who have any real sense, any real idea of what would make them happy, can see far enough to know that nothing can be perfect, and they do not set their happiness on what is quite unattainable; and if fortune selected them among the very few to be so blessed, they would not expect to find anything supernatural in either the people or the things they so longed for.”

“Then you think,” he said, “that a few people might be very much happier than their fellows, and that a very few actually are? Because many have a theory that happiness and misery are not so unevenly divided as at first appears, if we could look into people’s inner life.”

“I think,” she answered, “that the two ideas are not quite so inconsistent as at first appears. I don’t at all think that different people’s capacities for enjoying happiness, or of suffering misery, are at all nearly equal, but I think that in the same individual the capacity for one is equalled by the capacity for the other. I am rather a believer in the doctrine of compensation, and that it is very rarely that the people who are blessed with great happiness have not at some period of their lives to suffer great misery. It would be difficult to illustrate it, because though the world may form some idea of when they are happy, those are the dispositions that jealously shut up their sufferings in themselves.”

“Then you don’t believe much in demonstrative people’s feelings?” said Wilfred.

“I believe very often,” she answered, “in their having strong and sudden feelings, but I don’t believe in the depths of them; and I am quite sure that often those who are called hard and unfeeling, feel the most deeply, and that their reticence is mistaken for callousness. I don’t in the least think that demonstrativeness implies any insincerity, though it does occa-

sionally cover it, but I don't a bit judge of people's feelings by the show made. The widow who weeps the loudest is generally the one soonest consoled. Demonstration is a sort of safety-valve—a sort of letting off of steam. Tennyson expressed it well of the lady, when all her maidens watching said, 'She must weep or she must die;' and, of course, to many natures tears are an immense relief, being their way of expressing feeling."

"I think you are very right about demonstrativeness," said he; "for my part I am not fond of it. I always avoid a gushing woman when I can; and as for a gushing man, he should be put outside the pale. But what you have been saying shows how hard it is to judge of any one's feelings, and I always think we mistake them till we know any one very intimately. It is quite possible for people to be very intellectual, and talk very well about feelings, and to have very little indeed themselves."

"It ends, Mr. St. John, in our discovering at last how very few people we do thoroughly know; the study may be at times, amusing and interesting, but is often in the end sadly disappointing."

“Won’t you have some more fruit,” she said; “while we have been discussing such lofty subjects, these two small creatures have made the best of their time in silence, and look as though they would finish everything.”

“What beautiful fruit,” said he. “Does this come from the enchanted palace down in country?”

“Yes, it comes from Waldermere Park,” she answered; “which I am happy to say goes a long way too in keeping me in flowers. What a shame it seems to be, to stay here in all the heat and dirt of London, when it must be looking so beautiful, and such quantities of roses there must be by the amount the gardener sends me.”

“Do you wish you were down at Waldermere?” said Wilfred, turning to the little Hilda, who was engaged upon a large peach.

“Yes, I do,” she said, with her little mouth full of juice, “and so does Brebis; we can roll about in the hay together then, and I don’t like London.”

While he had been talking to Lady Waldermere, Wilfred could not help being struck with

the quietness and behaviour of the two little girls. They were both pretty children, and had inherited their mother's delicacy of feature and complexion, but the youngest was to him much the most attractive. She was really a brunette, but her colour was so fresh, and her skin so clear and transparent, that she seemed quite fair; she had her mother's large eyes, the colour of which changed so quickly and so often, and she had very soft light brown curly hair that was cut short, and stood in wavy curls about her little head. When she laughed, which was very often, she showed the whitest set of little pearls, and looked like a mischievous little fairy, and it seemed impossible to think that so light and fragile-looking a little creature could ever grow up into a woman, even so slight and graceful as her mother.

"And what do you do with yourself in London when there is no hay?" asked Wilfred.

"I have dancing lessons, and I read in the mornings and walk in the Park, or in Hamilton Gardens, and we sometimes drive with mamma in the afternoon," answered little Hilda.

"And whom do you talk to when you are

out? Don't you meet any friends?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! We meet some in the Gardens," she said, "and there is a park-keeper whom I like, and who always talks to me and a policeman, who is nearly always at the corner when we go out; he is a great friend of mine, and carries me over when it is wet."

"And which does nurse talk to, the policeman or the park-keeper?" asked he, smiling.

"Oh! Lum-lum talks to the park-keeper, but Poppy talks to the policeman," she answered.

"And who on earth are Lum-lum and Poppy?" said he, turning to the small Florence for better information.

"Oh! Why, you see, Lum-lum is Mrs. Lumley, our nurse, and Poppy is Ann, who helps her," answered that young lady.

"But why do you call her Poppy?" he asked.

"We called her Poppy because she had such rosy cheeks, like poppies; it was Harry first called her that when she came."

"Really, Mr. St. John," said Lady Waldermere, laughing. "I think you have got far

enough with domestic details for one day ; other little creatures have long ears besides little donkeys, and who knows when it al comes out again ? Now, chicks, don't you think you might let Brebis have dinner and run up to Lum-lum."

Little Hilda ran to fetch a plate that had been left for her curly friend, and then said, " Now, Brebis, sit up and say your grace ! " and up sat the poodle, eyeing the plate with an intensity of ' expression that only poodles have, and gave a short bark, ending in a howl.

" Make her say a long grace to-day for Mr. St. John to hear," said Florence.

" Oh, no ! my dear Flossy," said her mother, " please cut that ceremony short ; some day when you have Mr. St. John all to yourselves, you can give him as much of Brebis as ever he can stand."

" Well then, Brebis, laugh and you shall have dinner," she said, which promise made the woolly one show every white tooth in her black mouth, and then fall on to her dinner.

" Come upstairs, Mr. St. John," said Lady Waldermere, " and see my regions when not full of the gay world."

“ You have such a delightfully deep house,” said he, as they went out of the dining-room, “ there is so much space on this floor.”

“ Yes,” she said, “ there is this room, which is the library, and which we often use, particularly when we are in London, in the winter,” and she showed him into a most comfortable looking room, with an old carved wood mantelpiece, and a fire-place for burning wood in, set round with old Dutch tiles. Two sides of the room were all books, and the side opposite the large bow window was a great piece of old tapestry, representing some amorous and metamorphosic adventure of Jupiter, or one of his attendant deities.

“ Then there is Sir Henry’s den, and there is a bedroom too which is not often used, so we have plenty of space. Now I’ll show you upstairs.”

The drawing-rooms looked delightfully cool, with Venetian blinds drawn down, and flowers everywhere. If Mrs. Addington’s house could be called pretty and comfortable, this one could be said to be all that; and besides, there was over it all an atmosphere of such perfectly refined taste that seemed to reflect in it the mind

of the fair mistress, and Wilfred could not help turning from the examination of the room to look again at the fair priestess who presided in the shrine.

“ If you like to come into the conservatory,” said Lady Waldermere, “ you can smoke a cigarette while we have a cup of coffee. I have the evil habit of liking coffee after lunch ; it helps me keep awake during the dullest visits, and I get so frightfully yawny sometimes over some people’s small talk.”

“ You are not afraid of scandalising the ancient prejudices of anyone who may call by finding an odour of the sacred weed about ? ” he said.

“ Oh no,” she answered ; “ with me, in my own house, whatever I choose to do is right. Don’t you know enough of the world yet, to know that if you have a house, and give good parties, and make yourself well known, you may do almost anything that is a little eccentric ; and if I choose to give out that I should give one formal dinner-party a week, and allow smoking in the drawing-room, there are plenty of people who would see nothing to object to, and I have little doubt a good many who would

follow my example in another week, thinking it was the last new fashion, and quite chic. I often laugh when I think how these so-called leaders of fashion and society follow any one who will give them a lead; they walk just like geese in a row, and are as bad at taking a line of their own as I should be out hunting."

They were sitting now on the most luxurious chairs in the pretty conservatory, which was perfectly shaded, so that there was no glare of light whatever in it, while from it there was a view all the way up to the green clms of Kensington Gardens.

"Do you like being a leader of society, Lady Waldermere?" asked Wilfred.

"If you mean, do I prefer leading to being led," she answered, "I certainly do."

"No," said he, "I meant rather, do you like the life which the leaders, as well as those who follow nearest to them, have to live? What is, I suppose, called the life of the fashionable world, to use a common and rather senseless expression."

"I believe I like it," she answered "it is the position I find myself in. I don't exactly know if the Lord called me to it; but I try to do

my duty in it, as I was instructed to when I learnt the catechism as an infant."

"Yes, I quite agree with you that the leaders of fashion have their duties as well as any one else," said he, "but I am not going to give a moral lecture on them. You know them practically, and, as far as I can judge in a humble way, I should say quite act up to the precepts of your catechism, which you quoted; but you remember that how you do it all is one of the things that I have got to find out. But don't you find it is very hard work?"

"Yes, that much I will confess to you; it is often very hard work indeed to talk to people who bore you; to look pleased and amused when quite worn out, and to be civil to every one, is a great struggle in life. Still, I prefer doing it to being one of the nonentities in the world who make no impression on it at all."

"If you had been a man, do you think you would have liked to be a great leader?" said Wilfred.

"I cannot tell in the least what I should have liked under an impossible contingency," she answered, "but if my nature had been anything like it now is, I suppose I should prefer

leading to following; but you see very few can do the one, and a great many have to do the other."

"A matter of ambition, I suppose; without it no one would lead," said he.

"No," said Lady Waldermere, "I don't think ambition makes a leader, necessarily, or that a leader need be ambitious, though no doubt it has made more than one leader in the world. There are many who lead from inherent superiority in whatever their line is, and there are many whose ambition makes them remarkable, but in no sense leaders. One woman's ambition is bounded by the hope of being the tightest tied back lady in London; another desires the unenviable distinction of being the most *décolletée*; then diamonds, a heap of admirers, a box at the opera,—each of these is the height of the ambition of some women; and I have heard, oh! most strange of all, that there are women who would have charmed the hearts of the Great Frederick or Napoleon by having the ambition of an immense number of children. You cannot say her ambition would be to lead, unless it is cubs!"

"I see what you mean," he replied, "but

of course when we see anyone ahead of others, we are apt to call them ambitious at once."

"Yes," she said, "envy must have some epithet of doubtful compliment to bestow on whatever it sees has surpassed it in some way, and in whatever line or class of life you look, you nearly always hear the dissatisfied and discontented call those who have excelled them, or been more fortunate—at any rate who are ahead of them—ambitious."

"Using the word ambitious in an invidious sense," said Wilfred, "when their ambition interferes with the feelings of the speaker. As long as the object of ambition suits them, or does not in any way interfere with them, they generally applaud it, and too often they talk of a base and a noble ambition merely because the one suits them and the other does not."

"Oh! but don't you think," said Lady Waldermere, "that that is a very common failing with us all. We are so apt to approve of what we agree with, and abuse what we do not, without any reference to the motive of the person in question. I always think that it was well expressed in the argument about

theological opinions, that orthodoxy is my doxy, and that heterodoxy is your doxy; and too many people think every one must be a fool who differs from them. I once heard an old lady, arguing with a young one, finish up and clench it by saying, ‘ Well, my dear, that’s my opinion, and what’s more it’s the right one ! ’ ”

“ Yes, it’s quite true,” said he, “ and I remember once being much amused to hear the end of a discussion between two men who were rather warm, and one of them said, ‘ Well, you *think* I’m a fool, but I’ve the advantage of you, for I *know* you are one.’ ”

A servant at this moment brought in a note for Lady Waldermere, which she just glanced at, and said, “ There is no answer.” This interruption put an end to the discussion on ambition, and after a minute’s pause, Lady Waldermere said,

“ How did you get on, Mr. St. John, when you have been, as you have so often, in out of the way places with no really civilised or educated companion ? ”

“ Well,” he answered, “ I did what so many people have to do when they cannot get a thing ;

but you mean, I must have missed one very much, yet not so much as you would think. You see mine was nearly always a busy life, and generally one of action, and if we are constantly working our bodies, it takes us off our minds very much. That is why so many clever and very intellectual men have enjoyed rough travels so much, I think,—they find that the interests of action, and bodily labour, are a sort of rest to their minds, and I am quite sure give a healthy tone to them. I will tell you one advantage of that sort of life; it takes the mind so much off people, and fixes it on things. I don't know whether you will agree with me, but I think nothing so tiresome as conversation that is always about persons, and never about things. Don't you find many people who never seem to have an abstract idea in their whole life? Their minds and their talk run eternally on people, on their neighbours' shortcomings, the perpetual gossip about Mrs. Grundy and Lady Tittle-tattle. I really think that it was so much of that which made me so ready to leave London society for so long."

"Then I am very glad," said Lady Waldermere, laughing, "that I have kept the little

gossip about our neighbours from you to-day. I fear I cannot plead guilty of mere talking about them though, and of being frequently interested and amused by their doings."

"Oh ! but I don't for one minute mean to say that the people we live among in our everyday life are not most interesting, and I must confess to liking a good story as much as most people, but I like the reflections that come along with what we see happening. The people whom I mean are the sort who would read Thackeray or Edmond About for nothing but the story, and be very much bored by the reflections and ideas, while the authors only used the story as a peg to hang them on and to illustrate. It is the craving of such people for stories about wonderful social adventures, and their hatred of ideas, that has led to the debasement of the art of writing fiction by the sea of sensation novels which inundates England, in which the whole point is to surprise you, by showing you that Jack's father is John's son, instead of his uncle or first cousin, which they have been doing everything they can to persuade you for nine hundred mortal pages. I don't mean what I am going to say to you,

Lady Waldermere, as an empty compliment, but if I only found more people who enjoyed the sort of reasonable conversation I have had with you this afternoon, paying morning calls would be a most delightful occupation instead of such a bore."

"I quite accept your compliment," she answered, "and I assure you I like a sensible talk extremely, only it is not every one who can talk sensibly who will do so, or who would like to do so who can. And there are many clever men who are still fools enough to think that every woman is more or less one; or at any rate does not see that he is treating her as such, when he is wasting his time and breath in empty phrases and compliments to please her."

"And may I add, Lady Waldermere," said Wilfred, "that it is not every man who is allowed to chatter away for two mortal hours, in such a delightful house, and may I say too, without your calling it an empty phrase and compliment, in such very agreeable society. You have no clock in this little paradise of flowers, or I should never have taken up all your time like this, but I had no idea I had been here nearly so long."

“ You need not be so profuse in apologies,” said she, smiling, “ for if I had wanted to get rid of you I should have managed it, I assure you ; and as a further assurance of what I say, I hope you will come again soon, and have some more serious talk. I am always to be found at lunch with my chicks, and if Sir Henry is here, he does not mind how severe the talk is. Good-bye, I am sure to see you again in the busy world in a day or two.”

Wilfred wished her good-bye, and departed, feeling that he had seldom in his life spent two more delightful hours, and half an hour later he had the pleasure of taking off his hat in answer to a most pleasant little bow from Lady Waldermere, who, in the prettiest of summer dresses and bonnets, was driving up Piccadilly, with her two small girls, and the interesting poodle sitting by little Hilda on the back seat, surveying with a critical eye all the gay young men who made such flourishes with their hats to the pretty Lady Waldermere.

CHAPTER VII.

THREE weeks had passed since Wilfred St. John went to luncheon for the first time with Lady Waldermere, and made acquaintance with her small family.

Three weeks, which is so short a space of time, but into which so many events may be crowded. Spent in a quiet uneventful place, they may make no impression on any one's life, but in that brief time may pass scenes that alter the tenor of a whole lifetime.

That events with so important a result to any of the party who had met at dinner on Sunday evening in Charley Addington's house, had occurred in that time could hardly be said,

but several had occurred, if the constant succession of the gaieties of a London season can be called events.

They had gone to balls, to dinners, to the opera, had driven down on the drag of a friend of Mrs. Addington's, to the Crystal Palace, and had met each other continually at one place or another. Wilfred found himself growing more and more comfortably intimate with the two younger ladies, and had renewed all his former pleasant friendship with Mrs. Henderson. His wish to meet them often had driven him into society again more than he had gone for some years ; and the more he went, the more he felt how far above the generality of most of the women he saw, were his two new friends, both in looks and in agreeableness ; and as he had met one or other of them almost every day, each day had brought with it some additional pleasure, and added strength to his conversion to a love of England, and of life in London again.

July had come, and the days were at hand when fashion had decreed that all the world, who were the world, should leave Piccadilly in

search of green fields and pastures new, and each one was settling where they should go and browse.

Wilfred has not made up his mind where he should go to for a short time, before the middle of August arrived, when he was to go up to Scotland, and was debating between two or three plans that seemed rather pleasant, when he found himself one evening at a ball in a large house in that district commonly known as Belgravia:

He had just been dancing with a very pretty girl who was enjoying her first season, and was much amused at her enthusiasm. He knew some of her family, and had met her in her more youthful days, so that she felt perfectly at ease with him, regarding him with that mixture of confidence on account of his mature age and experience of the world, and at the same time with the pleasanter part of the feelings that she could have towards one of the boys who were going through the stage of dancing dog in society, and who alternately patronised her and snubbed her to show what important men they were.

He was sitting with her on the stairs enjoying a little air and rest after a very hot dance, and they were filling up the time with small talk.

"Do you think your first season has come up to your expectation?" he asked.

"Oh, quite!" she answered; "every one has been so kind to me; I think it is all perfectly delightful, and I am so sorry it is so near an end."

"I wonder how long the illusion of its delights will last?" he said.

"I think I shall always enjoy it," she answered, "as long as I am young enough to dance, and nice men will still dance with me. I love dancing, and it is so pleasant in London to meet the same partners night after night."

"But how many years do you think you could go on without feeling any of the jealousies and rivalries that spoil so many girls' enjoyment of the pleasure?" said he.

"Of course I can't tell," she answered; "but I don't see, Mr. St. John, why one must necessarily have them. I know that there are so many women prettier and cleverer than I am,

that I don't see why I need dislike them for it. Do you think it is quite necessary for one to come to it?"

"No, I don't," he answered; "and there are a very few women who go on, and who keep all their sweetness, without getting to dislike nearly every woman who crosses them at all, but I suppose it must be very hard not to, for so few women who go much into society seem able to escape it."

"Well, I hope I may be one of the few," said she; "but I see now, for instance, ladies older than I am, and far prettier, whom men much prefer being with, but I don't see why I should not think it quite natural, and find no fault with them for it. For instance, there is Lady Waldermere, whom you were with just now. I don't really know her, though she has been at mamma's, and we have been to her house, but I could never feel anything but admiration for her, and should think it most natural if every man was in love with her. When I have just spoken to her, and have heard her talk, she seems to have a charm I never saw in any other woman. I could not fancy it possible to be jealous of her,

her power would seem to me a matter of course."

"But still with all her charms and her kindness," he answered, "you would find that many women are envious and jealous of her. You see there are women—I don't know if you have found it out yet, but I think you must have—who live for admiration, and to see any one excite as much as Lady Waldermere does, causes them perpetual annoyance."

"I can understand it more," she said, "though I hope I shall never feel it, when whoever interferes with us seems to us an inferior, but when they are so far superior it seems to me to be absurd."

"Still it is generally their superiors that jealous women hate so," said he.

"Well, I hope I shall never be jealous," she answered; "I can't see why one need be; if people don't like me, and do like some one else, I don't see why I need mind it."

"Still it must be very nice to feel, don't you think," said he, "that every man likes you as much as they do Lady Waldermere?"

"Of course it must be nice to be so charming," she replied; "but one cannot be; she is quite lovely, you know, and she dresses so beautifully, these married women do cut us girls out completely."

"You think dress *does* make a difference?" he said, smiling.

"Certainly, we know it does, and then every woman likes pretty clothes and jewels. I am old enough to know that, however much of a child you think me," she answered. "Oh! there comes Mrs. Addington upstairs, now she is very pretty, and always beautifully dressed too, and she too always has a number of men who like her, but she has this difference, to me, from Lady Waldermere, that she always looks as though she wished to attract them, and took pains to do it, and Lady Waldermere seems to attract them without effort, and in spite of herself."

"Who will say, after this," said he, laughing, "that young ladies are not observant of nature. I don't believe that any of these boys of twenty, or one-and-twenty, has had sharpness enough to remark such a thing as that."

“I don’t think it wants much sharpness to make these sort of observations,” said she, and if it does it comes to me naturally, and without much labour on my part.”

“Still I congratulate you,” said he; “for you will find such a large part of the world who go through it without observing anything more than the lowness of Mrs. Jones’ gown, and the height of the heels on Mrs. Smith’s shoes.”

“Well, I will go on trying to observe,” said she; “but I am afraid I must go back again to mamma, for though she lets me have a great deal of liberty, she likes to see me now and then, and you have let me bore you for the space of more than two dances.”

“If every *débutante* bored as little as you do,” said Wilfred, “I should always choose my partners from the youngest in the room; and if ever permitted, should endeavour to extend my acquaintance in every family I was admitted to into the regions of the school-room.”

“Then,” said she laughing, “if you have any ambition in that way, and if you will come to us at five o’clock some day, I will

take you to school-room tea, and you can draw out my two sisters, and my cousin Ethel, who generally is with us every afternoon."

"I'll be sure to come," he answered, "and before the end of the week, so don't forget ; but who am I to ask for if your mother is out?"

"Oh ! I'll tell the butler," she said, "and he will know, so it's a bargain, and you shall tell me afterwards what you think they will be like when they come out."

"If there is anything in family likeness," he replied, "I have no doubt that the world will say that two more very pretty girls have appeared in it."

"To cut their elder sister out, I suppose," said she, "but good-bye now, I see Captain Fitzgerald, my next partner, standing by mamma, and waiting for me."

Wilfred stayed and spoke to the mother of his late partner for a few minutes and then wandered through the rooms, till he saw Mrs. Addington talking to a man who evidently bored her, so he hurried to her rescue.

Under the old pretence of an engagement to dance, and the long and futile search he had had for her, he soon cut her out from under the guns of the bore, and retired with her to a pleasant spot for observation and conversation.

"I see to-night," said Mrs. Addington, "that you have been devoting yourself to all the youngest damsels in the room ; since when have you taken to chickens ?"

"Since I made the acquaintance of that pretty young woman you saw me talking to on the stairs as you were coming up," he answered ; "I have actually found there a girl who does not wish to be old before she is young, and who sets herself to work to enjoy life without finding fault with everything in it."

"Do you think they all want to grow old in such a hurry ?" said she.

"I think a great many of them do," he answered ; "and when their wish is granted, they want to be young again a deal more, but all in vain."

"But do you find that girls want to grow up faster than they used to when you were

young, for instance, which is quite a century ago now?" said she.

"Yes, I do," he answered, "and I have noticed it very much with those I have been meeting during the last few weeks; there are some among them who want to compete in the matter of popularity among men with the young married women of society, and it is in their efforts in the race that they wish to make themselves so much older than they are; of course I don't mean in face, but in manners, in dress, in talk, and I was going to say in morals."

"But, for goodness' sake," cried Mrs. Addington, "don't try to make out that our morals are worse than those of the girls just coming out, because we are married, or because we are older than they are. Do you mean to imply that it is so in us all?"

"Oh! no, I don't mean that," he said, laughing; "you and I know that the morals of the fair young matrons of Mayfair and Belgravia are far above reproach, but no one can deny that there has been a brilliant exception or two, and that this being the exception, has not by

any means dimmed their brilliancy in the eyes of the world."

"Well, you see, these aspiring damsels see the brightness of these exceptions, envy it, and desire to attain to it, and too many of them try to climb to it by copying these fair exceptions as far as they dare. They hear rumours more or less vague, of their naughtiness and eccentricities, and they don't see any reason why they should monopolise all the goodness, and dulness, and the others all the naughtiness and the fun, and so they begin. Where they do stop and will stop, I leave them to answer for themselves about, or you to answer for them if you like, Mrs. Addington."

"No, I'm not going to answer for your fast young ladies about London. I have been married for years, and they are an institution, according to you, of a later date than my days of promotion; and as I have, thank goodness, no daughters to bring out, I am not obliged to make inquisition into the morals of all the young women I see playing about. But you seem to have dived so deep into their confidence and inner life, that I

think you can enlighten me better than I can you."

"I don't go in for their intimacy, I assure you," said Wilfred; "I take my information from observation, and the conversation of certain men about London, who are over five-and-twenty and under five-and-forty, and who declare that the ways and conversation of some of the young ones amuse their rather debased taste more than some of the fast married women who are older, and who are some of them, I should have thought, risky enough to suit them in all conscience."

"And who may I ask, Mr. St. John, made these young women like this?" said she, "for your friends don't seem at any rate to discourage them in their attempts to go the pace."

"Well, I am afraid I must confess that some of these men take a pleasure in drawing them out, and drawing them on," he answered, "they say that their ignorance makes them do and say things that older and more experienced women will not; and I am very sorry to say it, but there are men about London, whom I could mention, who take a pleasure in instructing

ignorance, as they call it, corrupting innocence it ought to be called, and to whom, so nice does their taste become, there is very little amusement in telling very doubtful stories, or in relating most equivocal adventures and scenes, to any but the most inexperienced."

"You must have a nice set of friends," said she, "may I ask you where they generally prowl about?"

"My set of friends are much the same as those of a hundred other men who are leading the idle and not very profitable life about London, which I am at the present moment; they are most of them idle enough, and, as Dr. Watts says, for such the mischief is always provided ready to hand; and more than one of them avail themselves readily enough of what is provided, and unfortunately they are generally the cleverest and most amusing, or they would not be very mischievous,—you might have seen one I refer to in this very house this evening."

"Well, I think it is a great shame," said she; "you know I don't pretend to be so very straight-laced myself, but I think that it is very unfair of men who have every advan-

tage of wits and experience, to use them all to destroy what they never can repair, the freshness of a young girl. I am not going to defend it, but if they choose to talk in their free and easy way to older women who have seen more of the world, I won't find so much fault, the game is fairer ; the matrons, as you call them, of Mayfair, can take care of themselves, more or less, and can snub them in time if they like, because they know their little game well enough ; but with a young girl, she is flattered at those sort of men taking so much notice of her ; then of course they amuse her, and for a long time she does not understand half they say to her. No, it is too bad, and I believe, after all, that you, Mr. St. John, are as bad as any of them ! ”

“ What *am* I to say in answer, *ma chère madame*,” said he, “ if I make a vehement denial, you will say the gentleman doth protest too much. I must have you to look at me and judge for yourself of my guilt or innocence. If I look like a deliberate corrupter of youth and innocence, I cannot help it ; and my telling you that my looks belie my deeds would be no use.”

“ No ; I was not in earnest, you know,” said she, “ but I am always sorry when I see a girl learning all the evil of life so young. Of course I have seen much of what you say, and I am very sorry that you think you see things changed for the worse in your memory of our society. I ain sure I don’t know how it can be remedied.”

“ Nor I,” he answered, “ but the change must come chiefly from women, I think. Of course, if you could suddenly make men cease to be amused at all that sort of thing, women would cease to try to amuse them by it ; but that is, I fear, never to be expected till the millennium, whatever that may be, and whenever it may come, an’l till then the reformation will have to come from the woman’s side, if it comes at all.”

“ So I imagine,” she replied ; “ you men always expect us to do all the goodness for you. I see many a man who wants to do all his piety and religion vicariously, by means of his wife, and expects to sneak into heaven holding on to the tails of her gown. And so in society and daily life, a man thinks it fair enough to put all the temptation he can in a

woman's way, and while he acknowledges all the while that 'she is the weaker vessel, he despises her if she makes a mistake in life and triumphs over her weaknesses, and then has the effrontery to go away, and talk about the decline in the morals and ideas of the women of his time."

"You are rather severe on us, Mrs. Addington," said Wilfred.

"Severe or not, it is true," she answered. "Are not you yourself proposing that instead of men—and as you say the clever and amusing ones of society—instead of their leaving off putting every evil and temptation in the way of young and innocent girls, it is the young and innocent who are by instinct to know their danger, and to nip in the bud the insidious conversation of those men who amuse and interest them. No! If you want to do away with an evil, you must destroy the source of it, and make men respect women in general more, and young girls in particular,—you must improve their morals and tastes a little."

"Right as usual, Mrs. Addington," said he, rather amused by her warmth, "you are giving me the finest moral lecture I have had for a

long time ; you are quite right, the men should reform, only unluckily they won't ; but I will repeat your sentiments, suppressing, of course, the name of my authority, to the men whom they concern, and I have no doubt of the result, or the effect on the tone of society."

"Oh ! I know you enough by this time," said she ; " my righteous wrath is wasted on a cynical scoffer like you ; but I have taken up my parable, and I feel better for it, and now I put it down again. I am not a fresh young creature just emerging ; men like you have done their utmost to rub the first bloom off my peach, and I think that I may converse with the likes of you, or even of your wickeder friends without much injury, so now for a space we will drop the innocent and the guilty girls of the period and come to ourselves. Tell me when you are going out of London, and where you are going to."

" Those are two points which I have not yet decided, so I fear I cannot inform you," he answered ; " but as you have given me your valuable opinion, already so freely this evening, can't you give it me once more, and help me to settle where to refresh myself after the

serious fatigues of this sort of life? Have you settled yet when you leave London?"

"Yes, I think we go about the twentieth," she answered. "We don't mean to go home, for it is not worth opening house there for a few days before going to Scotland, so I think we shall go and have a 'dip in the sea for a week or two, and then I shall run home for a couple of days on the way up to Scotland, where we go quite early. If you have nothing to do, why not come down with us to some amusing watering-place, and we will do our best to amuse each other?"

"A delightful idea," he answered. "I don't feel inclined to go to stay in a country house, even if I had any very eligible invitation, which I have not for so early. I have given up scouring over the country to play endless games of cricket for a long while now, and I hate going down to some sea-side place alone, so your proposition is doubly charming, as it saves me the trouble of making up my mind, and offers me the companionship of two most charming people. But are you not afraid of having a little too much of my society if you take such a dose of me before Scotland?"

“ I think my asking you proves that I am not,” said she, “ and in Scotland we shall have a lot of people coming and going, and there is so much to do that we need not bore each other if we begin to be inclined to, which at present I don’t see any symptoms of. Where shall we go ? ”

“ I don’t care a bit,” he said. “ I have not been to the sea in England for ages, so let us run through the places, and think. Brighton ? —won’t do, too hot, but have not you thought of one ? ”

“ We have thought of Cowes and Ryde, but we don’t feel disposed to meet all London again so soon, and the yacht is in the North, and it is not worth bringing it round for a week. Bournemouth is for winter, Hastings is very dull.”

“ How should you like to make an expedition to Margate or Ramsgate, and look at the citizens washing themselves ? ”

“ I dare say it would be amusing, but I hate such a crowd, and I am sure I could not stand them for more than a day.”

“ Well, Scarborough is very amusing and very pretty.”

"We thought of that, but we must go to Northamptonshire again before Scotland, and it makes two such long journeys."

"Then Dover, that's not a bad sort of place, and the boats every day are an event which helps to kill the time. And there is Folkestone."

"I have been to Dover, and I don't care very much for it," she said, "the walk on the shore becomes monotonous; but I think Folkestone is a good idea, we have both beach and cliff there; then there are the boats there too, and we can go over to Dover if we like, and it is not too large, and people enough to amuse us to look at. Then Charley is sure to have a friend at Shorncliffe. I am sure it will suit him. What is the bathing like?"

"Well, it's pretty good at some states of the tide, but you can swim well, can't you?" he answered.

"Oh! yes, I can swim, I am happy to say, but it is not so easy to arrange as in France, we cannot have the fun we could have there."

"Oh! I'll manage it, don't you be anxious. I can get a boat, and you can swim out with it," he answered.

“ Very well, then, we’ll call it Folkestone ; but how can we get rooms ? ” said she.

“ Why, if you settle with Charley to go there, you can write at once to the Pavilion ; it is better than bothering about a house and servants, and you can eat what they give you there, though the feeding is a little of the wholesale order, still I call it a more comfortable hotel than most I have stayed at in England.”

“ That’s settled, then,” said she, “ and now I think I’ll have another dance, and as dancing is not one of the matters of civilised life I am going to find fault with you about, you shall have the honour of being my partner.”

“ And as I should’ve to go a long way to find so good a dancer, I say yes, with infinite pleasure, so we may be both satisfied, and prove that our mutual compliments are not a mere empty form.”

Later on in the evening Wilfred found himself talking to Lady Waldermere, who was also on the flit very soon, and with her too he discussed the best way of getting through the next three weeks ; but she did not ask for his assistance, and instead of the sea, she was going

down to have a look at the late roses of Waldermere Park, and see the children having a roll on the grass before going up to Scotland. He had seen a great deal of her lately, and had become quite intimate, and on the most pleasant and easy terms; but he found, when he thought of her by himself, that his intimacy amounted to very little really; that her character was a perfect enigma to him, and that he knew nothing but the outside of her. Of her beauty and charm of manner he must have been blind, and senseless to be unconscious; and of the agreeableness of her conversation and the readiness of her wit, he had become most thoroughly appreciative, but of her true nature underneath he had no idea. She was the first woman he had ever met whom he was quite at a loss to make anything out of. If she was brilliant and shallow, or if this brilliancy was but the reflection of wonderful depths below, he could form no idea. She seemed so full of contradictions, at one moment expressing ideas thoroughly deep and serious, at another such complete frivolity, and seeming to take a pleasure in leading whomever she was talking

to into the lightest, and most frivolous talk, then when encouraged by her easiness the unwary admirer had advanced a step too far, pulling him up with such dignity, and such quiet ease, that while thoroughly checked, he was never so taken aback as not to be able to retreat with all honour, and with colours flying; and while perfectly convinced that no liberty could be taken with her, he was still able to take his place among her acquaintance, more an admirer than ever, but never likely to think that her light war of wit, quick appreciation of all that was amusing or ridiculous, for one moment implied lightness of conduct, or that while ready to let him do her all the homage as a wit and a beauty, that the forms of society allow, she would for one moment permit him to entertain the idea of ever passing beyond that.

Having seen all this from day to day, he could not help feeling a strong wish to penetrate deeper into her character; but so far he saw no chance whatever. She was always most pleasant, and most friendly, and she seemed to do him the compliment of really liking his society,—he had been often to her house, had

learnt to know her children like an old friend, and had tried to gather something of what she was from seeing her with them; but he had found out nothing except additional cause for admiration, by appreciating the intense love of her children for her, and the constant and perpetual care and thoughtfulness for them, that she preserved through all her busy round of social engagements and amusements. He thoroughly enjoyed and felt the value of this intimate life in her family, which he was so freely admitted to, and never felt for one moment that he had a temptation to let any word, or even an approach to it, of what is euphoniously called gallantry, come from him. But she was at the same time, in some inexplicable way, intensely a woman, and yet so much not a woman, at least as he had always seen them.

Though she clearly knew and enjoyed the charm and power of her beauty, and took a pleasure in showing it off to the best advantage, yet there seemed to be moments when in her heart she utterly despised what the world thought of her, and did not care in the least if she was admired or not. Then, too, there

were times when she let her high spirits, and her enjoyment of what was bright and gay and amusing, carry her away into regions where many a woman could not have ventured without fear of the accusation of fastness; but with her the whole time there was such an evident reliance on her own self-respect, and such a sense of her power of self-restraint, as to ensure to her the deference of the boldest and most reckless man, and effectually to stop the ever vigilant and malicious world from finding fault. It was these strange contrasts in her which so puzzled him, this feminine love of admiration, and unfeminine superiority to it, with so complete a power of repressing the admirer,—a combination so strange and so perfect which he had never seen before, nor even believed in; and he often came to the conclusion she could never have had any heart, or it would have shown itself in some way in all these years, and that some peculiar coldness and apathy under it all must be her secret.

But apathetic, or sensitive, charming she was; and as he never dreamed of being her lover in any sense of the word, it did not

much matter to him while she remained so pleasant; and he felt now, as he sat talking to her, after not knowing her for more than five weeks, as though it must have been as many years. The curious contrast between his three friends amused him very much, they were all so pleasant, but so entirely different, that it was possible to go from one to the other with ever increasing pleasure and interest; and now that the season was over, he could feel that he might look forward to seeing nearly as much of them for a long time to come, so that his time this season at all events had not been thrown away; and if he was to lead an idle life he had collected all the elements for making it a pleasant one.

“What shall we do to finish up the season with, Lady Waldermere?” he asked, after they had been talking for some little time; “I think we ought to have a party of some sort to wind up all things, though we are going to meet again so soon.”

“Can you suggest anything amusing, Mr. St. John?” said she, “don’t you think everything is getting a little flat now? I feel at the end of all things like this, as though one

made great efforts to amuse oneself without very much result. Every one seems a little wearied, and energy has so left them that it requires a great exertion to amuse them."

"And no one seems up to that exertion. I observe that even the crop of stories and scandals gets very feeble at the end of the season," he replied.

"I suppose because the invention of men becomes used up," she said.

"Why? do you consider that we are the originators of all the gossiping stories about?" he asked.

"Yes, I do think of half of them; if you ask any woman where she heard a story, it is nearly always from a man, and hardly ever from a woman," she answered.

"And whose fault is it?" said he; "if we do retail stories of that kind we are driven to it."

"By such as I am, *par exemple?*" she asked.

"No, not by such as you are," he answered, "but by such as so many women are, and you must not be surprised. The process is this. I pay a visit to some well-known lady of rank and fashion, and after I have carefully asked

after the health of her precious self, of her still more precious husband, and if he has a father alive, after that of the old man, who she wishes so would depart to Abraham, and let them come into their kingdom, and after she has answered by saying that she has been very ill, that her husband is very cross and stingy, and the old man as tough as an old chancery lawyer, without even asking after my poor complaints, she says, 'What's the news?' or, 'Tell me something to amuse me.' Forthwith, I, in the innocence of my heart, to please her, plunge into the latest gossip of the hall or smoking room of my club. The story very likely was rather limp and pointless originally, but I touch it up, and it is delicious, and she vows I am very amusing, she relates it all to you or some other fair creature, with her additions, and you both declare that we men are the most scandal-mongering things alive; but you again pass it on with variations, so that in a week I hear my own story again, but, poor thing, almost unrecognisable, and with names, places, and everything changed. Well, I grant you I had no business to tell her the story, but if I don't amuse her, she

says I am the dullest dog in creation, and I would sooner you gave me a bad dinner, and still worse champagne, than say that of me; the effect of the one goes off in a couple of days, and does not ruin my digestion, but the other does not pass, and my reputation is seriously impaired. •No; the good ladies of London are not so different from the old Athenians, and still spend much of their energies on telling or hearing some new thing, and it is this thirst for knowledge that makes men become such gossips.”

“Then, you put down half the stories that are about to the desire of men to please women?” said she.

“In the sense I have just explained it, yes,” he answered. “Of course I don’t mean to say men don’t gossip among themselves, but women do encourage them tremendously in it; and I don’t think that you will say that I am maligning your charming sex, when I say that very many women do take a small pleasure in hearing that there has been a little cloud on the hitherto spotless mirror of the character of some fair friend. It adds for them a piquancy to the story which men do not feel nearly as much.”

"And you think that even this power of invention dies out at the end of the season?" she asked.

"Yes; I think you see it most strongly, and hear most stories about Easter, when all the world is reassembling, or in the autumn, when they have been scattered a bit after the season," he replied.

"Well, I suppose we all do like to hear what's going on," she answered, "and I won't be such a hypocrite, as to pretend I am not amused by hearing it, especially if it is really something ridiculous or with a point to it. I suppose this requirement on our part for mental food is a great stimulant to the imagination of would-be agreeable men. Perhaps it is as well for the few shreds of character which they leave behind that exhaustion should arrive now and then. But we are arriving no nearer to what our last gaiety is to be before quitting this scene; do you know, I halfthink that you had better all come and dine with me for a wind-up. If it is a fine night, we can go and smoke a cigarette in Hamilton Place Garden close by, which is not a bad apology for the country; and if the weather is doubtful, my

conservatory is a passably good place, as you have condescended to discover more than once this summer. I really rather doubt if my energies are up to a train late at night any more at present. So, as engagements have become few, I will propose it to such of our little set as are here to-night, and then we can wish each other farewell in a formal manner."

Having settled this, they set to work to look for Mrs. Addington, and arranged a day with her on which to collect as many as they could of their little party for a final dinner in Park Lane.

The next few days were passed as usual by the people still left in London at the end of the season, in trying to work up a little extra steam for a few concluding parties and dances; but a feeling pervaded all that they would be glad when it was over, and they could get away to fresh air; and as they were all to meet again so soon, there was none of the feeling of taking leave of those whom they had spent so much pleasant time with.

Very nearly the same party who had dined together at the Addingtons' six weeks before

met in Park Lane, and freely discussed the events of the past season. What they individually had done, and the exploits of various friends, the marriages certain, and those still in the air, with here and there a comment on the relations of a more amusing nature, while Charley Addington was particularly facetious, being very much encouraged by Frank Digby, on all matters of at all an equivocal nature. The dinner was pleasant, and the night was beautiful, so they all adjourned to the Gardens of Hamilton Place, where Mrs. Addington amused herself by taking Sir Henry Waldermere off and making him flirt with her, and then gave an account of all he said, with her own improvements. Sir Percy Fitzroy devoted himself to Lady Waldermere again, and seemed determined that, whatever that lady might think of him herself, at any rate the world should believe that she fully appreciated his merits. Wilfred St. John talked in a quasi-sentimental way to Mrs. Henderson, who had adopted towards him lately a caressing manner which he hardly understood, but as it seemed to amuse her, he thought that there was no reason he should not gratify her by returning it to a proper extent.

They had taken a turn down the garden, apart from the rest of the party, she leaning in a confiding manner on his arm, and she had been making some remarks about the charm of the scene, the softness of the weather, and all other circumstances that make the moment delightful, when she rather startled him by saying,

“You don’t seem ever to think of marrying, Mr. St. John; I have often wondered in you, that, while so many men in your position are always talking about it, and thinking of it as a way to fortune, or to some money, at any rate, if not for higher motives, you never seem to think of it at all.”

“But I have thought of it very often, I assure you,” he answered, thinking of his conversation in the punt at Maidenhead with Mrs. Addington, when she asked him why he did not marry a widow, as he was so fond of married women, and at the same moment he could not help smiling inwardly at the thought of Mr. Weller senior’s warning about widows in general, and almost wondering if this widow in particular then meant him to amuse her by a proposal, and possibly by accepting

him. The thought was amusing, and a little wee bit flattering, so he went on to say, "I have considered the matter in all its bearings, and I cannot see any reason for marrying. I can rub along as I am, and have no wish to be beholden to some woman whom I don't care for, for a large house and a lot of horses, and I haven't been in love for so long that I have forgotten what it feels like."

"I wonder at your saying that," she answered, "you have always seemed the sort of man who would make a most amiable husband, it would be a shame to let you grow up an old bachelor."

"Good gracious!" thought he, "she don't mean to give me a chance of dying one! It is not Leap-year, and I don't think she took much champagne at dinner, or am I dreaming!" so he answered,

"But an amiable old bachelor would be such a valuable thing, Mrs. Henderson, they are supposed to be so rare, and one would have such a good time of it, that it is almost worth denying oneself the sweets of matrimony, whatever they may be, to be able to look forward to such a pleasant old age."

“I don’t believe that the most amiable of old bachelors has such a good time of it, as you say,” she answered, “it is that which makes them often so crusty ; better gather the rose-buds while you may, Mr. St. John. You know what an old friend of yours I am, so I feel I am not taking a liberty in talking to you, but I really often think I should like to see you married, happily of course, and sensibly.”

Wilfred did not exactly know what to say, his fair companion might be only talking of things in general, or she might be alluding to herself, as his vanity prompted him a little to think, so he answered,

“Well, Mrs. Henderson, you know how much I esteem and value your kind advice, so we will think of it, but one need not be in a hurry over it, and I will have a good look round this autumn and winter, and take counsel with you again before long, but there is no hurry, you will allow.”

“Of course there is not,” she answered, “but I don’t like to see you hardening your heart, and shutting out all ideas of love and mutual sympathy, and I trust to see you

happily married before this time next year,—real love and true confidence are the sweetest things on earth.”

Wilfred was very much inclined to say he hoped to see her married too before next year, but with what was passing in his mind he dared not, so he made some general observation of acquiescence, and they soon rejoined the rest of the party.

Before they separated, Wilfred settled with Lady Waldermere that he would come back to London on his way north, and see if he could not manage to travel up with her, as they were both going very early in August to Glen Dhu, and he then left many loves for his small friends and took his leave. He was to go the next day but one to Folkestone with the Addingtons, Sir Percy was off at once to fish in the north, Frank Digby was going yachting, and Mrs. Henderson to pay a visit or two in the country, and come to Glen Dhu a little later.

Wilfred and Frank Digby walked away up Piccadilly together, and played a last rubber of the season till daylight did appear, and then took a morning stroll in the clear bright

air, when London looks like a fresh and cheerful foreign town, instead of the metropolis of gloom, and the towers of Westminster seem to come up close to Piccadilly and let the early or late gazer at them see what they would be like in an Italian air. For more than half an hour did they walk up and down together, discussing the past season, and much of their past life, and they made several vague guesses as to what would happen between then and the end of the ensuing season, before they said good-bye, expecting to meet again in Scotland.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LOVELY July afternoon, and the express on the South-Eastern rushing along at fifty miles an hour through the pretty scenery round Reigate and the fertile plains of Kent, all now doubly beautiful and rich in the glories of early harvest.

Addington and his wife and Wilfred St. John were together in a compartment from which the guard was specially instructed to exclude the profane herd, so that they might occupy all the space they liked, talk about what they liked without rude listeners, and break the Company's bye-laws as much as they liked by smoking where there was no licence.

Charley Addington was most happy to get out of London, but he had not quite made up his mind if he was pleased or not at the

prospect of some days at Folkestone, still he was in a good humour, but a little aggressive.

“ Well, Bessie,” he said at last, after he had settled well down to a cigar of unusual dimensions, and speaking in his usual way, utterly regardless of what to so many men would be the *convenances* of society, “ as you must have a young man with you, I am glad you have this time chosen one that I can get on with too.”

“ Have you been generally badly used in that respect, Charley ? ” said Wilfred, laughing ; “ has Madame not usually consulted your taste, or rather has your taste not generally been as good as hers ? ”

“ Oh ! don’t listen to what he says, Mr. St. John,” said she ; “ whenever he has got bored in general, and out of temper in particular, he is always down with some sarcastic remark about my latest friend, and then we spar a little.”

“ It does not require me to be out of temper in particular,” said her plain-spoken better half, “ to pick holes in some of the dear friends you have selected, and certainly I must have

been most catholic in my tastes if I could have followed you through all your different selections. Now, let me see who there have been. I'll tell you, Wilfred, if I can remember the chief ones who have strutted their little hour, and then been heard of no more. One, no, two plungers,—that was early; plungers all elbows and spurs and swagger are to the taste of quite young girls; they have long moustaches which they milk at, as the Yankee said, most industriously to try to make their brains 'give down,' but quite in vain, so they make up with any amount of 'side,' for the deficiency above; but their clothes are pretty to look at, and they scent themselves with the latest essence of polecat, to ravish the nose of the ingenuous maiden. Then, I think, still military, it was a youthful guardsman, with no end of an opinion of himself, and the manners of a gentleman to those he liked, and of a bear to those he did not; of course I was unlucky enough to be among the latter. Then, as near as I remember, the next was in the country, when madame had a devout fit for a change. A very high church young curate, with a demure face and no linen. I believe he wore

a hair shirt, and did not wash, to imitate the ancient saints, before cleanliness was supposed to be anywhere near godliness, and I was told she confessed to him. I hope he was edified, for I have no doubt he pumped her well about me, as we could not agree about anything but some brown sherry of mine, which he found very mortifying to all carnal appetites. That lasted some little time, till they fell out about a dance in Lent, and the strong objection to attending early services which the lady had, while he declared them to be necessary to salvation. Then there was a literary fit, and an insinuating barrister had a turn; he was not a bad fellow, clever and bright, believed in nothing except the sacred right of clever men to make love to every woman they saw, and console them for being slaves to such dull husbands, but he was an arrant prig, and laid down the law to me at my own table as if I was the foreman of a petty jury. Then there was a sucking peer, who was being sent about the world by his parents to pick up experience as he had no brains, and he thought my wife might help him, but I must say she was soon sick of him, though he was uncommonly good looking. I

heard afterwards that he went to Paris and formed a *liaison* with a very second-rate married lady with a drunken husband, and he spent a lot of money over that business. A friend of mine amused me about it ; he told me that his old father said a *liaison* with a woman of fashion would form him; whatever that might be, and that his mother remarked to him that dear Adolphus had spent a lot of money over it and was not a bit formed. Well, after him there have been others, besides the hunting ones, who are generally much more at home in a sixty acre pasture than a drawing-room, and now you are having a turn, so make the most of it ; you know something of your predecessors,"—and having finished his long oration, Charley Addington relapsed into his large cigar, which he had taken refreshing sucks at every now and then.

Wilfred had listened with an amused expression on his face, and Mrs. Addington, too, with one of half amusement, and half-screwed up at times to pretend contempt, though she could not help laughing at the absurd account Charley was giving of her

various admirers, and when he had finished, she said,

“Well, Mr. St. John, and don’t you admire my taste after the graphic description of my friends, which Charley has been entertaining you with? which do you like best, and which do you dread comparison with most?”

“I fear I am so unlike them all,” he said, “that nothing but contrast can make my society endurable. If I was not buoyed up by that hope, I should return to London by the mail to-night.”

“I am not going to let you do that if you suit the situation at all,” she said; “for I cannot fill your place now, and a month’s warning is required before you can leave it, so you must make the best of it; the work is light and the victuals plentiful, with drinks and baccy found.”

“What shall we do with ourselves?” asked Wilfred.

“Why, nothing at all, of course,” said she; “I have come down here on purpose to do nothing, and that’s why I brought you to help me to do it. I mean to bathe, to sit on the

beach, and to sit on the cliff, and to sleep a good deal. If I am not mistaken Folkestone is just the place to do nothing in, and the daily boats are excitement enough for any one."

"What will Charley do?" said Wilfred; addressing himself to either of his companions who chose to answer his question.

"Very much what he is doing now," answered his wife, looking at Charley, as he was sitting with his large cigar in his mouth, reading the last debate in the paper, and with several pamphlets and a blue book close at hand, which he had unearthed from his travelling bag, "and then he'll go to sleep, wake up and fidget. He'll report to us on the state of the camp and troops at Shorncliffe, and the defences at Dover, which he would drag you all over if I would let you go, but I don't mean to, as you are to be my retriever while we are here."

"I confess I prefer that to military inspections," said he.

So they talked on till the train ran into the harbour station at Folkestone, and after a cup of tea they went out on the beach.

The first thing I want, Charley," she said, "is a chairman; no, I think you, Mr. St. John, may begin your duties by engaging me one. I will have him first on trial to-morrow, he must be always ready to pull me up and down that cliff whenever I want to go, for I never intend to walk up it this hot weather."

"How am I to know the points of a good chairman?" said Wilfred. "Shall I have a race among them, or make them all draw me up and down the cliff till I see who does it quickest?"

"I can't tell you," she answered; "what is the use of you if you don't find out those sort of things?"

"Well, I'll try, but I have often seen that the oldest looking men, and the ones with the thinnest legs, seem to pull the best. I suppose you don't care much about the look of him?" said he.

"Of course I don't. I am not going to marry him, like the old lady at Brighton, who fell in love with the back view of her chairman," she answered.

"Very well, I will find one for you. Shall

ne go up on the Leas after dinner this evening?" he asked.

"Oh! yes, I think so, and you must have him ready by then," she replied.

"Do you mean to dine at the *table d'hôte* at all?" asked Wilfred.

"Yes, I think so; I shall want some change from you and Charley continually, and once in a way it amuses me," she answered; "the natives of England are more curious than those of any foreign country, and they think it quite necessary to make themselves peculiar in some way or other; then I always talk to my neighbour and try to make out who and what he is, and I find myself in the midst of a flirtation with a bagman or an Israelitish picture dealer, and it is quite an amusing change after the men Charley has given you such an animated account of."

"To-night I am going to dine in our own room," said her husband, "so if you want to flirt with Abraham or Isaac or Jacob to-night, you must spare me for taking the attention of Rachael or Rebecca off her money-making half's little game."

"I'm not going to flirt with any one to-

night, for I am tired," she answered, "and I am now going in for dinner, as I have tasted a little fresh air."

The rooms that the Addingtons had got were very comfortable, looking on the sea and the gardens, and they sat after dinner enjoying the sea breeze and the pleasures of coffee and cigarettes, the former but moderately, as coffee-making is not an art studied on the north side of the channel.

They watched the sunset and the sea, and tried to think the tranquillity delightful, but the restlessness of the last two or three months was on them, and Mrs. Addington soon asked if her chair was at the door, and they climbed up the cliff to look at the people wandering about in the perfect evening weather; and up there even their troubled spirits found rest, watching the distant fishing-boats, and the moonlight growing brighter on the rippling water, the far-away lights of Boulogne and Cape Grisnez twinkling in the growing darkness, and the lights in the scrambling old town of Folkestone gradually appearing below them.

"This is really a delightful change from London, isn't it!" said Wilfred. "I am beginning to feel quite sentimental, watching this soft view below us, and with such a charming companion by my side."

"Don't use up all your sentiment to-night though," said Mrs. Addington, "for I intend to draw upon it largely for my entertainment during the next few days. We must have something to talk about down here, and sentiment is a good thing for a change, and at the seaside."

"Do you prefer talking about it to feeling it?" said he.

"I like both," she answered, "but it must be all done judiciously and at the proper time; sentiment may be a very inconvenient thing if we don't keep it in proper restraint, as a sensation only to be resorted to now and then for an amusement. It is a good servant, but a bad master."

"What a pity every one has not got it under the same command, it would save a lot of trouble in some families," said Wilfred, "but I do not exactly know what one wants with it at all."

"Oh! but I don't like other people not to

have it," she said ; " you must have plenty. It is I who must keep it in good training, or I could not enjoy it so much in some one else. *L'un qui baise et l'autre qui tende la joue.*"

" Is that your idea of what it ought to be ?" said he ; " but all the same, as long as the game lasts, I am not quite sure that the one who feels the most does not have the best fun out of it, even if they do pay for it by a little sting of regret."

" But I don't like the sting of regret at all," she answered, " and though I like amusing myself very much, I have no idea of suffering for it afterwards."

" Well, at any rate, we may amuse ourselves here without any fear of regretting it afterwards, so we will do our best. First, when are you going to bathe, and will you come for a swim to-morrow. I will arrange about a boat if you will. I shall go and have a dip early, and will report upon it at breakfast."

" No, I'm not up to a long swim. To-morrow I shall take it easy and try my paces, and perhaps the next day we will amuse ourselves."

While they were talking Charley Addington had found an acquaintance also taking the air on the Leas, and had wandered away with him smoking, and left his wife and Wilfred chatting on about nothing in particular, feeling more and more like very old acquaintances than friends of only a few weeks. At last she summoned her chairman again, and was safely conveyed down the hill to the hotel, retiring to bed very shortly, and leaving Wilfred reading a French novel he had got hold of, and her husband dozing in an arm-chair.

The next morning Wilfred found that all his late London habits had disappeared, and that he had no power to remain in bed. The sun shone in at his window with a blaze of light, and he tried in vain to snooze off again to kill the time, so that eight o'clock saw him rolling about in the gentle swell of the waves half a mile out at sea, till he was hailed by a boatman, who told him that he was too far off from shore. A mild altercation ensued, in which he suggested that if he drowned himself it could not matter to the boatman; but that individual said he was put there to prevent it, and should get into trouble if he did,

so he begged him to return for his sake, and if he meant to drown himself, to take a boat to do it from, and not to swim out from a machine. So, blessing the paternal care of the authorities of Folkestone for the bathers, he drifted gently back again. But he had time to smoke more than one cigarette on the grass in the hotel garden before Charley Addington came lazily out to tell him there was a chance of breakfast.

After breakfast they sat on the grass and read the morning papers ; then Mrs. Addington bathed, and astonished the natives by the long swim she took, while Wilfred collected a store of fruit which they lay on the shingles and slowly consumed ; and amused themselves by watching the habits of the visitors, who held a little feast of tabernacles close to the bathing machines, and watched the ladies dipping and ducking in the peculiar garment, so clairvoyant in the sun when wet, which the British maid or matron, at other times so neat and tidy, and so strenuous in her efforts to conceal the outline of the form divine, adopts when taking a dip in the sea.

“ Well, thank goodness, I did not look like

that," said Mrs. Addington, as a very stout lady of some fifty summers emerged from a small wave in water ankle deep, and began springing up and down in a wet clinging garment that would have proved to all her enemies that at any rate her dress required no improving, and that she could defy all her friends to say that she wanted any making up.

"No, my dear," said Charley Addington, "you look more like a young woman just going to dance on the tight-rope."

"Tight-rope or not, I have the prettiest bathing dress I ever saw," said she. "I only wish I could show myself off in it on shore. What a lovely costume it would be to dance in!"

"Shall we have a party," said Wilfred, "a real seaside dance, only bathing dresses allowed? How do you think our stout friend there would look?"

"I should like to see Alice Henderson in one," said Mrs. Addington, "she would look well waltzing in one—truly classical it would be!"

"But Lady Waldermere would take the shine out of some of you, Bessie," said her

husband; "she has a pretty figure if you like."

"I won't deny it," she answered, "and I'm not jealous a bit."

"Are we to do this every morning?" said Addington. "I think a week of it will try my patience rather."

"You need not unless you like," she replied. 'You can go to Dover or Shorncliffe, or anywhere else, and find more congenial employment very easily."

"Or go to anywhere else, my dear, you seemed to imply; but this is a bit monotonous?"

"You restless fidgety old thing!" she exclaimed. "I came down here to be monotonous, and if you begin to stir me up so soon, I shall say you may go to anywhere else very strongly. I *do* mean to do this every morning, and I mean to sleep most of this afternoon. I shall be very sleepy after my tubbing in the ocean, so you will have to let me alone, and can worry Mr. St. John if he does not feel disposed to rest."

"Which he does very much indeed," said that young man, "can't you be quiet, Charley, for just one week in your life?"

“ Well, I see there is nothing to be got out of either of you, so I shall have to amuse myself,” said he.

“ How I wish I had your energy,” said Wilfred. “ It’s you who ought to have been the poor man and I the rich one. You would have made yourself rich and famous by this time if you had been obliged to expend the superfluous steam in work.”

That afternoon Mrs. Addington carried out her threat of laziness, and dozed over a book on the sofa, while Wilfred read and dozed in a large chair at the window. Charley Addington did the same for some time, but went out at last to relieve his restlessness ; and so the day passed by. The chairman took the fair dame and her attendant squire up on to the Leas before dinner, and again after it to listen to the band. They got to know half the people by sight, and found out who some of the celebrities were, and came to the conclusion that a large number of the lost tribes were taking the air at Folkestone, and they were able to admire the fair proportions of some of the youthful daughters of Israel, and wonder how it was possible to walk up the cliff in such tight

kicking-straps—as Charley called them. The following day Wilfred had his boat in readiness, and Mrs. Addington was towed out to sea behind it, and they had their first long swim, the only incident in it being that he helped her into a sailing boat, which was lying at anchor, to take a header out of, and that there emerged a stout old seafaring man from a sort of cabin, rubbing his eyes, and thinking when he saw Mrs. Addington that he had at last caught a mermaid, and making that lady take the most brilliant header she had ever done in her life.

They dined one evening at the *table d'hôte*, but Mrs. Addington did not find an amusing neighbour, while Wilfred made eyes at a pretty little Jewess opposite to him, and Charley made remarks on everybody and everything so loud that he drew everybody's attention to him. Mrs. Addington voted it not a success, and they did not try it again.

The days passed on, and two of the party passed them lazily enough. Addington went to Shorncliffe and to Dover, and found friends and acquaintances; while his wife was establishing a sort of flirtation with Wilfred. He found her very bright as he always had, but

under it all there was a softer touch of womanliness that he had not discerned before, and she amused herself by growing a little sentimental, and trying to raise a little sentiment in him. She talked of her past life, and of her many flirtations, with some regret, and tried to persuade him, and herself too, that it was only the force of circumstances which had driven her to that sort of thing. That Charley had never understood her, and she had continually been in search of a kindred soul. Wilfred could not help remembering with amusement the list of her adorers that her husband had given him, and wondering in which of them she had found the affinity; but still it was pleasant, and he did not struggle very hard against the half-sentimental friendship that they were drifting into. He did not imagine that either of them were in much danger of injuring their hearts, and it amused these two old hands at the game, to play with each other, as though both were quite novices in the art, and were in desperate earnest, while so well did Wilfred play his part, that before the end of their sojourn at Folkestone she really believed that he was harder hit than he cared to say by her charms, and she was as pleased

as *la belle dame sans merci* to have another knight in her thrall, and a knight who was so used to the ways of *belles dames*, and so well able to take care of himself.

At last they declared themselves refreshed by the soft sea-breezes, and had killed enough time before the Addingtons wanted to go north; and Charley swore at last that he could stand no more; that he had inspected the camp at Shorncliffe, till the regimental dog and cat used to stare at him as if they wondered if he was a Government official come to cut down their allowance of catsmeat; that he had counted all the pile of skulls in the church at Sandgate, and could make a report on the Admiralty pier, which, like the celebrated cathedral, designed by the infernal artist, seemed doomed to be never completed, and go to Kirthorpe he would to have a day or two there before going north. So, one fine morning the three bid good-bye to the old smuggling village of Folkestone, and the new watering-place tacked on to it, and departed, the pair for Northamptonshire, and Wilfred to pay a visit to his sister in Kent before going up to Scotland.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Addingtons had gone off to Glasgow to meet their steam yacht there, and go in her up to Glen Dhu, there to establish themselves for a couple of months.

Wilfred St. John spent some quiet days at his sister's among the hop-gardens of Kent, and then once more returned to London.

The session was over, and the few members who had stayed on to help at the massacre of the innocents, had with joyful hearts shaken the dust of London from their feet, and Piccadilly and the Park were a forlorn desert, tenanted alone by those unhappy mortals, government officials, etc., whom necessity compelled to linger on in the deserted city. The smartest and most correct young gentleman had discarded the tall hat and frock coat of society, and walked freely about in the same

garments that he longed to air on mountain, moor, or river. Half the clubs in London seemed shut up to be cleaned, and the few men who met each other in those still open looked surprised, and made apologies for being in town, as though it were an offence to disturb the solitary state of the other at his dinner in the coffee-room.

Wilfred St. John found the club he was in the habit of haunting the abode of dismalness, and was very glad that he was off to Scotland so soon. A letter from Mrs. Addington dated Glen Dhu informed him of their arrival there, and also that they would send their yacht to Balmacara to meet him, where he might very likely fall in with the Waldermeres.

To Park Lane he very soon turned his steps, and found that they had come up to London on their way north, partly because Sir Henry believed in starting from London itself on any long journey, and also to start the children on their way to a sister of his who was to take care of them in their absence.

Wilfred had come up in the morning, and so he dropped in at luncheon-time to make sure of finding them if in town.

Lady Waldermere seemed charmed to see a living creature, and Sir Henry was quite cordial, but he had not imitated his younger fellow-citizens in discarding the formal attire of life, and wore his usual correct frock coat and a most voluminous satin scarf of the Regency style.

Wilfred's two small friends, Flossy and Hilda, welcomed him most warmly, and made Brebis come and shake hands with him, and he was introduced to their brother Harry, the hope of the family, who was home from school, a bright curly-headed boy with his mother's large eyes.

"I came here to ask when you were off to the north," said Wilfred. "I have a letter from Mrs. Addington, and I think I shall go to-morrow night and travel through to Inverness."

"That's just what we think of doing," said Lady Waldermere; "it's a horrible long journey this hot weather, but I cannot see any use in taking two bites at it; one may as well swallow it whole."

"I am afraid you will be very tired, Hilda," said Sir Henry, who always got desperately fidgety on a long journey, and wished for an excuse to stop in Edinburgh.

"I should be much more tired by a night in Edinburgh, or Perth," she answered. "Oh, no ! let's go right through by all means, and we will telegraph that we will all be at Balmacara or whatever the place is, the next afternoon ; they promised to meet us with the yacht, and it is the only way to get at that out-of-the-way place, I believe."

"Will they ever get a telegram there ?" said Wilfred. "Some of these places are such miles from a station."

"We must try at any rate, and write too ; will you do it, Henry, or shall I ?" said she.

"Oh ! I'll do it," he answered, "while you take the children out this afternoon."

"Well, Hilda," said Wilfred to his small friend, "and what did you do with yourself at home ?"

"We had great fun," she answered, "and Harry came home and he says now I have my hair short I am nearly as good as a boy. I want mamma to give me a little sailor dress, and then I should be one."

"Oh ! do, mamma," said master Harry, "she would look so jolly in one, and it would be so much more convenient to play in !"

"Mamma, do you think I shall grow up a man or a woman?" said little Hilda.

"Well, my dear, you can take your choice later on and see which you like best," said her mother, laughing.

"But I should like to choose now, and go back to school with Harry," said she.

"Wait till after next summer holidays, and then you will be old enough to, dear," she answered.

"How are Lum-lam and Poppy?" asked Wilfred.

"Oh! they're very well, and going with us to Aunt Elizabeth's," said Flossy.

"Have you been to see the Park-keeper and the policeman," asked Wilfred, smiling.

"Yes, we had a walk this morning," answered Hilda, "and saw them both."

"John says the Park-keeper is married," said Harry, "so it's no good their making up to him."

"My dear, that's enough of domestic details," said Lady Waldermere, not knowing what might be coming next. "What are you going to do this afternoon, Mr. St. John? We are going to drive down to Kew Gardens,

would you like a little carriage exercise, and not mind the kicks of the children?"

"Very much, indeed," he answered. "I have nothing on earth to do, and shall be only too thankful to you for taking me."

"Then we'll start at about half-past three," said she. "I am sure London is so empty now, no one can make a remark about my driving any one about with me; shall I pick you up or will you stay here till then?"

"Oh! no, he'll stay here," cried little Hilda; "he must stay and play till then. You'll stay, won't you, Mr. St. John, and Brebis shall do her tricks?"

"Yes, I'll stay," he said, "but you must let me take it very easy this hot afternoon." So stay he had to, and went up and had to submit to be pulled about on the floor of the conservatory till he got very hot. As he left the room, Sir Harry said to him, "You had better dine here this evening with us if you are not engaged; we are in a scramble,—if you will excuse it."

Of course he was only too glad to, and as they went upstairs, Lady Waldermore said,

"I am glad you are coming, for Sir Henry

gets so fidgety before a journey, that I should not have liked to ask you unless he had proposed it."

The drive down to Kew was very pleasant. Wilfred sat opposite Lady Waldermere, with Harry by his side, and the children could kick each other to their hearts' content without disturbing them. Lady Waldermere was in a most amusing frame of mind, and chaffed him a little about his visit to Folkestone, and how he had got on with Mrs. Addington. He gave her as amusing an account of it as he could, and told her how restless Charley Addington was, and he could not resist repeating his account of his gay wife's numerous admirers, but he did not think it necessary to tell her that there had been something very like a sentimental spoon between him and the fair lady, though she laughingly asked him if Charley would add his name to the list, and under what head he would come.

They found the gardens at Kew delightful, and could sit in a shady place and talk while the children ran about, and Wilfred could not help comparing the intellectual powers of his present companion with those of the lady he

had seen so much of a short time back, and had grown so far more intimate with. Here he felt certain was a mind that was really worth studying, but all his efforts to pierce into it seemed in vain, and his attacks seemed only to glance off the surface, and to give him no idea of what was under that polished outside. At moments he almost tried to persuade himself that it was not worth the trouble, but, persuade himself or not, he always returned more interested to know more. After their separation of a week or two, she seemed so really glad to see him, and to treat him with so much less ceremony, that he began to hope the day might come when he could call himself her intimate friend, and he looked forward with the greatest pleasure to the weeks together in Scotland that were before them.

They talked on about all sorts of subjects, and as the evening got cooler had a walk about the beautiful gardens, till it was time to collect the children and drive back to London, and felt most thankful as they returned to its dust and heat that it was only for one day, before they departed to the lovely air and scenery of the Highlands.

At eight o'clock, on coming to dinner, Wilfred found that Sir Henry had picked up a congenial companion who had stayed on to the end of the session, in hopes of airing his particular hobby in the House, and was now abusing the Government to any one he could get hold of, for not keeping him a house while he galloped his hobby round it, and tried to persuade the Government of the great desirability of introducing homœopathic doctors into the British Army. He was great upon it all dinner time, and listened with intense interest to any symptoms of complaints, which Sir Henry had ever fancied he had, when, for want of better occupation, he had had a fit of valetudinarianism. Lady Waldermere had to listen and encourage him, and Wilfred could not help admiring the way in which she interested herself in homœopathy in general, and his ideas in particular, though he knew how much it must bore her. But as all mortal things have an end, the ill-used upholder of medical reform in the British army talked himself out at dinner, and proved a very sensible man when once he had descended from his favourite horse ; and they had a general

discussion on the past session, and the state of the world generally, which lasted till Wilfred wished good-night, proposing to look out for them at Euston Square the following evening, where they had sent to secure their places.

The following evening after the lightest dinner at his club in solitary state, Wilfred found his way to Euston Square Station, where he had previously sent his servant with his luggage. Ticket and place were taken, so he he had not to fuss himself, but just to walk about, and amuse himself by surveying the people, and picking out a few acquaintances and several well-known faces of travellers bound to the north. The dresses and manners of the people were an amusing study. It was easy to pick out the old accustomed travellers, in comfortable garments quiet and pleasant to look at, and cool and soft to wear through a hot night in a dusty train. There were others who evidently thought it just the moment to show in how startling a get-up they could astonish the world, men in marvellous checks which required three legs to show the pattern, and making a parade of plaids thrown round

them as though they were to take the part of a Highland chieftain at a transpontine theatre, and letting the whole world see that they had got guns enough to hunt Behemoth, and fishing tackle enough to catch Leviathan. Then there were women, some looking so neat and comfortably dressed, who had evidently often made the journey before, and had left the *chefs d'œuvre* of Worth and Pangat behind them in London, and taken in exchange the pretty simple dress that neither dust nor rain could spoil; and others who were resolved to display the powers of their invention in travelling dresses of wonderful shape and hue. Some seemed in a perpetual hurry, and could not persuade themselves that their luggage was not all left behind; and others were rushing about for no reason under the sun, except that it seemed impossible for them not to get in the way, or to wait quietly till the train started.

Wilfred recognised Sir Henry Waldermere's sedate gentleman, who touched his hat to him as he passed the door of a carriage where he was standing; and before long, Sir Henry and Lady Waldermere appeared. Sir Henry

had actually left off his tall hat and frock coat, and wore a most respectable dark grey coat, a sort of compromise between a frock coat and a shooting jacket, and a soft grey felt wide-awake with a broad brim and a tall crown, and a white and blue striped choker two or three times round, which suggested ideas of apoplexy before morning if he slept in it. His face wore an expression of disgust and resignation mingled, and he looked most indisposed for conversation. Lady Waldermere wore a very pretty light thin dress, and a small neat hat with a feather curled round it. She looked the picture of good temper and freshness, and evidently meant to defy the utmost the railway could do to disturb her equanimity. As she walked down the platform, every one turned round to look at her, and more than one lady who had shown signs of triumph at the effect she was making, looked upon her in despair and retreated to her carriage.

“Come and see us in the morning,” she said to Wilfred, as he joined her on the platform; “it is no use asking you into our carriage now, as Sir Henry is the fidgets themselves on

a journey, and I mean to sleep like a dormouse."

"I shall look in on you before that," he answered, "as I am in the next carriage, and am sure to take a stretch or two in the night; but I hope to see you quite in peace when I do."

He came to offer his help, but a comfortable bed had been made by the faithful guardian and Lady Waldermere's clever and mysterious-looking French maid, and a bright lamp arranged so that she could read easily, or draw a dark shade across it if she wanted to sleep. Sir Henry just spoke to Wilfred, but his mind evidently misgave him as to how he should feel before he got to Inverness, and he did not like to compromise his dignity by looking put out.

But every one had to settle themselves down at last, and the train was soon rushing through the warm night air and the white mists in the meadows at a mile a minute. Wilfred could not help thinking often of his fair neighbour in the next carriage, but being an old traveller he curled himself up comfortably, and at last was sound asleep. At Carlisle he

took a walk down the platform and looked in at the window of the next carriage as he passed, and saw Lady Waldermere sleeping most comfortably, with one cheek buried in a large white pillow with a frilled border, and the other slightly tinged with a soft pink flush, while her long eyelashes seemed like an extra curtain to shut in the brightness of her eyes. She looked as quiet and peaceful as a little child asleep, and Wilfred could not help lingering a minute to watch her, and thought that he had never before known she was half so beautiful. Sir Henry was half asleep with an expression of settled gloom upon his face, and Wilfred could not help thinking that he would not be the liveliest companion all the next day. Then he returned and curled up again, and did not awake till it was broad daylight.

How different was the country already, through which they were travelling in the lovely weather of the early summer morning, to the scenery of the south that he had so lately left! Distant hills, and wide open plains, purple with heather, and here and there a rapid stream, all reminded him that they were

near the border, and the name of Gretna on a small station, brought to his mind all the old stories of the days of romantic travelling; the excited and frightened couples who had been borne there with all the speed of horses, flying from the anxious and infuriated parents and guardians, toiling vainly after them. Passing the neat farms, which contrasted favourably even with the boasted cultivation of Kent, and he could not help thinking that the days were gone by when the yeoman of Kent with his yearly rent would buy up the Laird of the north countrie so easily. On they rushed at express speed, and Edinburgh and the Lothians were left far behind, while the scenery became more and more interesting and beautiful, till at last the train steamed into the Perth station, after more than twelve hours of hot and dusty travelling.

It is hard for any one to look cool and unruffled after a long night in the train, but the old weather-stained traveller has the advantage, as a little more dust and a little more heat, and less sleep, tells but slightly on his face, compared to the pale complexion of the man fresh from the late hours of London; and few

women are very presentable, it being nearly as trying as a few hours of rough sea. But when Wilfred got to the door of the next carriage, at which Sir Henry's man was already standing, looking as calm as though it was the door of the baronet's dressing-room in Park Lane, he was not prepared to see any one look so bright and fresh as Lady Waldermere. She did not seem to have been long awake, as her eyes were still glistening with the effects of her last nap, and except looking a little pale it would have been hard to see any trace about her of having passed the night out of her bed; certainly no one could accuse her of waking up in the morning looking yellow, and it would have broken the heart of many a fair lady to have seen the freshness of her complexion at that hour.

Sir Henry was hardly a joy for ever to behold; he was evidently very cross, and very uncomfortable, and it was as much as his equanimity could stand, when with a bright little laugh, his wife asked him how he felt, and it was with a great effort that he managed to say a civil good morning to Wilfred as he got on to the platform to seek some

place to repair his damaged toilette a little.

Lady Waldermere wanted but little time to repair the imperceptible damages in hers, and when he rejoined them again, looking a little comforted, he found her with Wilfred discussing café au lait and rolls, and concluding with an immense bunch of grapes which had made the journey from Waldermere Park.

They soon settled themselves into the train again, and Wilfred was seated opposite to Lady Waldermere, while Sir Henry sat at the other end of the carriage, not at all inclined for conversation, and plunged at times into a substantial-looking book. Once he roused up and talked to Wilfred about Scotch farming, and seemed quite astonished that he knew more about it than even he did, which sent him up enormously in his estimation, and the arguments about draining and subsoil ploughing sent him back to his corner again at last in a good humour.

The weather was a most perfect specimen of August weather in Scotland, and the scenery grew wilder and more interesting as they went

on, With regret they passed at such a pace through the magnificent scenery of Killicranky, with its splendid profusion of mountain, forest, and moor all together, and the beautiful torrents that continually lent their charm to the picture, and on away north into scenery that left no doubt that the lowlands were left behind. Wilfred looked alternately at the beautiful scenes they were rapidly travelling through, and into the face of his charming companion, while neither of them seemed for one minute to feel the fatigue or irksomeness of the long journey. They talked on hour after hour about the scenes before them, about other countries, people, and books, and felt almost sorry when at last they arrived at Inverness. But none of the party were above appreciating the charms of water and fresh clothes, and fully enjoyed their dinner at the very comfortable Inverness Hotel, and a stroll through the town and a look at the Ness in the soft long northern twilight, then early to bed to prepare for the rest of their journey the following day.

By times in the morning they were embarked in the Dingwall and Skye Railway, and soon

found themselves travelling into wilder and wilder scenery. The large and prosperous looking farm-houses, with their crowd of buildings and stables round them, became more and more rare, and the hills were wilder and more rocky, and seemed devoted to nothing but sheep, and often for mile after mile there was nothing at the side of the railway to be seen but a long wooden palisade to keep off winter snow drifts. Rock, mountain, and heather, brilliant now with its purple blossom fully out, and from time to time a rapid stream ran for some way by the railway, with now and then a deep quiet pool, looking fit for the favourite haunt of gigantic trout or salmon. A few straggling houses and shepherds' cottages gave evidence here and there that the country was inhabited, while every few miles they passed some smart shooting lodge with trim lawns and neat plantations, and often with large gardens and long range of glass-houses, to testify to the wealth of the owner.

At last cultivation seemed to cease, and flock after flock of sheep covered the hill-sides, black faced and white, white faced and black,

and active looking shepherds in knickerbockers, and with long crooks, proving to the people from the south that that instrument was used for other purposes than to complete a fancy dress, or make a model in china. And with each shepherd two or three colley dogs, not the long-haired fat sleepy-looking half-bred gordon setters that lounge with every young man up Piccadilly, and only rouse themselves up to fight each other, or to bite a child, but light, wiry-haired animals that could often run down a hare, and to whom fatigue is unknown. All ideas of speed had been left behind at Inverness, and the block system seemed to be quite unnecessary, as there did not appear to be more than one train on the line, which the utmost ingenuity of mismanagement could hardly make run into itself. Every station was stopped at, and with the exception of tourists and visitors from the south, every body seemed to know every body, and Sandy, Colin, Archie, and Donald had a bit of a crack at every place, and took frequent sociable sips of the creature to show that there was no ill-feeling. At last, after passing what seemed like an inland sea, the train ran into the quiet little station of Strom Ferry.

The luggage was soon collected, but then the difficulty began, for how they were all to be transported over the hills to Balmacara, seemed to be a mystery. At first the natives declared that there were no horses of any sort to be had, and that the tourists had engaged them all.

Wilfred had a great mind to apply to a man in the full dress of a Highland chief, who was airing his legs up and down the platform, and ask him to order out some of his clan to help them. It was quite evident what he had come up to the north for, at the first glance. All that the tailor and shoemaker could do for him to make him a Highlander had been done. His voluminous kilt was of a tartan that had never before graced any hill-side but that of the slight declivity of Regent's street, and his jacket was of the most elaborate cut. His pink podgy-looking knees stared out over stockings the most fanciful that the mind of Macdougall's best knitter could invent, and he was cross-gartered in a way that would have made Malvolio die of envy when he went to charm the eye and heart of his fanciful mistress ; dirks and knives and forks, with cairngorms as

large as cricket balls peeped out of every chink, and his feet were encased in shoes that were a perfect marvel of leather work. The head of an unknown monster grinned on his Sporrán from his portly stomach, and the whole was surmounted by a red face that told the tale of many a civic feast, and a Glengarry bonnet with an eagle's feather in it. The effect was magnificent, but looked far more fitted for the promenade than the mountain side, and it was difficult to imagine those stout calves taking that portly form anywhere off the level. This magnificent person was so wrapt up in himself that he did not look as though he would appreciate the joke of being applied to for help, or rise, if Wilfred had gone up and addressed him by the title of 'Strom Ferry,' as he proposed doing to Lady Waldermere, while Sir Henry was getting into his first fuss about the want of horses.

Wilfred proposed to him that they should walk on, and leave the servants to bring the things, but that his uneasy mind would not consent to. At last a sort of fly was found, and a cart, which together were capable of

holding the luggage and two or three people, but horses were still absent. A thing with four legs was at last found and put into the cart, which was sent off with Wilfred's servant in charge, and horses for the fly were procured as soon as a young honeymooning couple from Edinburgh had returned from a drive. Wilfred proposed to Lady Waldermere to walk on after the cart; Sir Henry declined to do so, but as it was quite impossible for him, and her, and her maid and man, and Wilfred, and the rest of the luggage to get into the fly, he agreed to their starting on and waiting for him as soon as Lady Waldermere was in the least fatigued; so away the two started for their first walk together in the Highlands.

The road was good, and the hills not very steep, but the scenery very wild and barren. Moss and heather near the road, then above that rock, and then heather and rock mixed together, altogether it looked so rugged that it puzzled them to think what those comfortable-looking black-faced sheep up there could find to eat, which looked down upon them with such contempt.

Fir-woods and homesteads were quite left

behind, and they only passed in all the way two or three miserable-looking cottages, built of stone, with very little window and no chimney, while the heavy peat smoke was streaming out of the cracks between the stones, and suggested an atmosphere inside that would want a different rate to them to support life in.

It was not too hot, and the air was delightful, and as they walked on, it seemed like inhaling draughts of some new and exhilarating gas, till Lady Waldermere walked on mile after mile, and could not imagine where she got such strength from. Both of them enjoyed their walk much, and were almost sorry when they got in sight of the straggling village of Balmacara, and saw the yacht lying a little way from the shore, in the narrow strait that separated them from the blue rugged mountains of Skye.

As they got near the village, Charley Addington came to meet them, and after giving them a cordial welcome to the Highlands, exclaimed,

“But have you two bolted together and given the baronet the slip? What will Bessie say?”

"We only gave him the slip at Strom Ferry," said Lady Waldermere, "he will be here soon, but he was waiting for horses till a honeymooning couple returned from an excursion."

"Oh ! then he'll be here soon," said Charley, "honeymooning couples soon get sick of long lonely expeditions ; but come on board and see my wife, and get some refreshment. You have made a fair start in walking, Lady Waldermere,—Bessie thinks herself a wonder for a smart lady, but she will have to look out."

"I had no idea I could have walked so far," said she, "but sitting so long in the train must have given me strength. How long shall we be getting to Glen Dhu?"

"About two or three hours, when we are once off, but it depends on the tide rather, as it runs very strong here at times. It is as calm as a pond to-day."

They were soon in a boat, and alongside the 'Harpy,' which was a very comfortable steam yacht of more than two hundred tons."

Mrs. Addington was at the side, and Miss

Featherstone with her. She embraced Lady Waldermere most affectionately, and then repeated her husband's question as to where Sir Henry was, and if she had eloped with Wilfred St. John.

"I thought" she said, "that my good company had so raised his moral tone, that it would have been impossible for him to do such a thing. I assure you, Hilda, that he was a pattern while he was at Folkestone, and talked more goody-goody than he ever had done in a fortnight since he was a little boy."

"But what a lovely yacht you have got, Bessie!" said Lady Waldermere. "I wonder you never make any long journeys in it, it is so roomy too."

"We are always threatening to go to the Mediterranean some winter," she answered, "but when it comes to the point, the charms of hunting carry the day very easily; some winter, if circumstances should occur to prevent my hunting, I shall go."

"What fun it would be to make up a party and two yachts," said Lady Waldermere, "but Sir Henry hates it so, and is always ill."

"Do you often go out up here?" asked Wilfred.

"Not very," she answered, "but now and then we have been out when it blows hard to freshen us up. She is a splendid boat in a heavy sea; you shall try if you like."

"Well, we'll see when the heavy sea comes," said Lady Waldermere; "to-day I must say I am glad it is calm."

"There is the fly and the honeymooning horses at last!" exclaimed Wilfred, as the conveyance in question appeared in the road.

"What a long flirtation Sir Henry has had with your serious-looking attendant, Hilda," said Mrs. Addington, "I shall ask him if the honeymooning horses affected the atmosphere of the fly."

"I suspect they have had rather a solemn journey," said Lady Waldermere. "Henry did not look much like flirting with any one when we left him, but we will see what you can do with him. I think he gets more lively with you than with any one else I know."

While they were talking, Charley Addington had got Sir Henry and his companions with the luggage into the boat, and they were soon

alongside. Sir Henry put on a cheerful expression as soon as he saw Mrs. Addington, and he had not been on deck five minutes before she had him in the best humour possible.

The anchor was soon up, and they were steaming away down the narrow sea that divides Skye from the mainland, while tea was produced for the benefit of the weary travellers. Charley Addington went up on to the bridge, and Miss Featherstone went with him, while Sir Henry devoted himself to Mrs. Addington, and Wilfred and Lady Waldermere made themselves comfortable to talk and look at the scenery. After observing it for some little time, he turned to her and said,

“I have heard so much of the beauty of the scenery here, but, do you know, I am rather ashamed to confess that I am a little disappointed. The coast is so like a great many other coasts I have sailed along, rocks at the waters’ edge, grey hills above them, but nothing remarkable, unless it is the absence of any trees or signs of life. It looks to me from here to be barren, but not wild enough to be grand.”

"I feel rather as you do," she answered, "but I think views from the sea are very apt to be disappointing. Of course, I don't mean that there are not some which are most wonderful, but so many look so much finer when once you are on shore, and I fancy we shall rather find it so here. I have always heard people say here, too, that the scenery grows on you more and more every day you live among it; but we shall see later on, and we will remember this, our first impression of it."

"Are you a believer in first impressions, Lady Waldermere?" he asked.

"Of people, or places, do you mean?" she said.

"Well, I meant more particularly of people, of places it is not so interesting," he answered; "but some people believe so very much in the correctness of them that it often becomes a prejudice with them."

"I believe a good deal in the correctness of them," she replied. "I think we often grow to like people very much whom we are quite indifferent to at first, but if we take a strong dislike at once, our natural antipathy seldom

misleads us, and though we may get over it, and come almost to like the object, it nearly always does something to show us how right we were at first. Children and animals seem to have a strong natural instinct in that way, which seems to be hardly ever mistaken."

"And what do you think of love at first sight that is talked so much about?" he asked; "do you think it is merely a fancy, or a stronger sympathy of some kind that is excited?"

"I have never quite been able to make up my mind," she answered; "it seems at times to be a much stronger feeling than a mere fancy, but I have often observed in people who have indulged in it that it blinds their judgment for a long time entirely to what the object is really like, and, if it cannot last for ever, now and then causes a painful awakening, often too late to be anything but painful."

"Yet," said Wilfred, "I really believe it is very common, and unless it were, I am sure that many marriages would never come off. If people all looked dispassionately at each

other for a long time, they would see so many defects that they could never make up their minds to marry."

"Then you think that many marry people whom they have fallen in love with at first sight?" said she.

"I think that this happens a good deal," he answered, "both to men and women. They dream over their ideas of love, and build up ideals for themselves, and they then fit their ideal on to some man or woman whom they meet, and who does not in reality a bit deserve it; and having personified their ideal they fall in love with it, and shut their eyes to all defects and shortcomings, and if they can continue blind for ever, *tant mieux pour eux*. Some do succeed in doing it."

"Do you remember in Longfellow's 'Hyperion,' " said she, "when Flemming is in the carriage with his friend driving away after Mary Ashburnham has refused him, the conversation on love and young women?"

"Oh! yes," he said, "and Berkley is telling him of his early love who declined the honour of being his wife and told him he was in love, not with her, but with certain

attributes, and he says, 'D— your attributes,' 'Sir,' she answered, 'you have been drinking,' and so they parted. She was a practical young woman, but not far wrong according to my theory."

"Then, do you think that no sensible man or woman would marry unless there were a little of the glamour of imagination to blind their judgment?" she asked.

"Oh! no, by no means," he answered, "but it is much harder to love in that way, any one whom they have studied and know so well, but if they do,—I am speaking of people capable of what I call judging, and loving,—it is then real and deep, and probably for life. That is what I call happiness, Lady Waldermere, but," he added, after a little pause, "I think it is rare in life."

"Yes," she answered, "I fear it is rare, and I am sorry to have seen so often among my friends that the most sensitive and most capable of happiness are by no means the happiest."

"What are you two people discussing so earnestly?" said Mrs. Addington, laughing, as she and Sir Henry came up to the pair.

Your faces both look so long and solemn that I am sure it is some question of social philosophy."

"I don't quite know what that may be," said Lady Waldermere, "but something like metaphysics, what one cannot understand, I suppose, but we were talking about the folly or wisdom of first impressions."

"You know the Scotchman's idea of metaphysics, don't you, Mrs. Addington, as you are a laird?" said Wilfred.

"Being a laird has not made me Scotch," she said, "and I don't know."

"Well," he said, "when the mon that's listèning does na ken what the mon that's spaking manes, and the mon that's spaking does na ken what he manes himsel', them's metaphysics!"

"And did you understand what Mr. St. John said about first impressions?" asked Mrs. Addington. "I dare say it was so deep he did na ken what he meant himsel'."

"Won't you give us your opinion?" said Wilfred, "I don't think we ever discussed it in any of our long talks on the beach at Folkestone."

"Oh! I believe in first impressions tremendously," she answered, "love at first sight is always strong, and hate at first sight stronger still."

"But did you never learn to hate what you loved at first sight?" said Wilfred, laughing.

"Oh! yes," said she, "but then I loved at first, so I made no mistake. I fell in love with you at first sight, my dear Hilda; did not you, Sir Henry?"

"I believe I did, Mrs. Addington," he answered rather slowly and pompously, "and neither of us have lived to find ourselves mistaken."

"Take care that neither of you do," said Lady Waldermere, "the sage said call no one happy till his Death, so don't call love perfect till then. You might quarrel with me, Bessie, though I hope not."

"Love till Death!" said Mrs. Addington, "that is a very serious and solemn idea, and one not entertained so very much in this century we live in, I fancy. Why one hears people discussing terminable marriage leases, instead of an out-and-out sale, and a perpetual holding."

"But," said Wilfred, "love till Death, and an indissoluble union of bodies are two different things; if you can ensure the one, the other becomes delightful, but without it a little trying; so as I never expect the one, I never mean to try the other."

"I hope," said Sir Henry rather solemnly, as his feelings of propriety began to be a little shocked, "I hope you are not speaking seriously," Mrs. Addington. I consider the marriage tie too sacred a thing to be lightly spoken of, and I cannot approve of changes of ideas on the subject being suggested even in joke. In these unlucky days, change and radicalism have gone far enough, without attacking the most sacred ties of life even in jest, and many good and honoured institutions have been in the end destroyed by being attacked in the first instance by jest and satire."

"But I did not make a joke of it," said Mrs. Addington, laughing. "I was only chaffing Hilda about her solemnity on the 'love till Death' idea. Wives always love their husbands till they die, you know, Sir Henry; I mean, of course, till the husband

dies ; then they can do as they like, and some love them a deal more than they did when they were alive ! ”

“ And take a good deal of trouble very often to impress it on the unhappy man who has aspired to his vacant place,” said Lady Waldermere, laughing.

“ But you good people are all arguing instead of looking at our wonderful scenery,” said Mrs. Addington, “ only Charley and Miss Featherstone are doing justice to it.”

“ I think Charley seems to be doing justice to her pretty face,” said Wilfred, laughing, “ quite as much as to the pretty scenery, by the way he is looking at it.”

“ Oh ! it’s all right,” said Mrs. Addington, “ he never talks nonsense like some of you do ; and you will see I shall marry Lily Featherstone off beautifully, and she will make a pattern wife.”

“ I am sure a few years of your society, Mrs. Addington,” said Sir Henry gallantly, “ has quite changed all that in him, if there ever was anything to change. I am told that the young men of the present day are sadly falling off in the respect due to ladies.”

"On the contrary," said Wilfred, "I assure you that my contemporaries have taken a pattern from the generation preceding us and are trying to outdo them."

"I hope it may be so," he replied, "but sad stories have been told to me at times."

While they were talking, the yacht was running along through the rocky realms of the old Macdonalds and Macleods, and the rugged mountains of Skye had for some time been clear against the setting sun, while the yacht steamed smoothly and quietly on through the lovely summer evening, and suddenly rounded the point at the entrance of the loch at the top of which was Glen Dhu.

"Oh! what a lovely view," exclaimed Lady Waldermere, "that is beautiful! I have quite altered my opinion already. Mr. St. John, could anything be more perfect! Who would talk of the rough inhospitable north, after seeing this in the soft summer's evening light?"

"But who would have thought that just turning the corner round that point could change the scene so entirely?" said he.

And they sat silent and gazed on the magnificent scene. The deep dark blue loch, without a ripple on its surface, and so shut in by mountains that it seemed to be an inland lake. The mountain rising abruptly from its sides in grand masses of grey rock and purple heather, all glowing in the rich light. The shadows deepening up the mysterious-looking glens, while the sun still lit up the mountain tops above them in a blaze of golden light, the glory aloft making the gloom in the valleys deeper and deeper. Nothing looked hard, nothing looked bare or rugged, all was bathed in soft warm light; and as the sun sank lower behind them as they came up the loch, it seemed to shed a bright hue of welcome on all the fair scenes they were approaching. Its last rays touched the white gables of the house through its surrounding pine woods which came down to the very edge of the water, and lit up the little village that straggled along the shore of the loch, while a mighty mountain towered up into the glowing sky straight above them.

The fascination of the scene seemed to be upon them all as in silence they watched it,

while the yacht, with the engines almost stopped, floated noiselessly and perfectly smoothly towards the house.

Wilfred turned to his companion, and saw upon her face an expression that never passed away from his memory, as she sat there and seemed transfigured by the splendour of the scene, and the magic charm of the light and the hour. She looked as though she saw far away beyond the mountains and the sea, and then she turned her face to the heavens that were all on fire with the most gorgeous sunset, and gazed on them till he could have thought it was the face of an angel that had caught its glory and inspiration from above, and when she turned to him again her eyes were full of tears.

As they looked behind them the mountains on that side the loch were almost black, so deep was the purple tinge on them, with the sun's brilliant rays gleaming over the top, and leaving the valleys below in perfect darkness, while the heaven above was a brilliant rose pink, with long soft streaks of sky which took the softest and most delicate sea-green tint between the bright masses of clouds. While

lower on the horizon, and seen through the two mountains which formed the mouth of the loch, the sun was going down in clouds of every imaginable brilliant hue, and as it disappeared in the sea and among the distant islands it left long lines of gold and red in the sky, which gradually broke up into isles of red, purple, and gold clouds, and left over the whole air a soft rich tinge, while, as the bright light left the mountain-tops, the deep darkness lifted a little from the valleys and glens before the real hue of night fell upon them.

As they drew near the shore, Wilfred turned to Lady Waldermere, and said in a low voice, "I don't think that the remembrance of this scene will ever pass from my mind. My whole journey up here has been like a dream, and this seems such a fit and solemn ending to it."

They were roused out of their earnestness by the voice of Charley Addington giving directions about landing, and a few strokes of the oar brought them close to the house of Glen Dhù. A large grey deerhound and two rough terriers came to meet them, and gave a

most demonstrative welcome, and a very short walk through the pines brought them to the porch of the house.

The hall was panelled with dark wood, and adorned everywhere with antlers and heads, the trophies of the chase, and the spoils from the monarchs of the glen, while the marble pavement was covered with deer skins.

From the hall they went into the most charmingly furnished drawing-room, hung round with water colours, which opened into a very large conservatory, in the centre of which was a fountain, with a large space in front of it, carpeted up to the edge of the heliotropes and verbenas with black bear-skins, and provided with delightful arm-chairs and cushions to lie or sit in luxury on. The drawing-room had a deep wide fire-place, in which a log-fire was nearly always burning, so that, whatever the weather was outside, it had the assurance that the damp air of the Highlands was effectually excluded.

A more cheering welcome than the whole house seemed to give to the travellers after their long journey, it was impossible to imagine.

“My dear Bessie,” exclaimed Lady Waldermere, “but this is fairyland! You have got the palace of Alla-a-deen here instead of a shooting lodge!”

“I have tried to make it comfortable,” she answered; “but come up and see your room; you will have lots of time to admire if you like later on, and we all rather want our dinner after the sea air.”

The rooms upstairs were quite in keeping with those they had seen downstairs, and the number of bath-rooms seemed fabulous; while there was an air of comfort and order about them all, and a total absence of stiffness that set the guests at Glen Dhu at their ease before they had been half an hour in the house.

The house had been added on to more than once, and internal comfort had been considered instead of external appearance, so that it was extremely rambling and not easy to a new comer to find the way about.

The living at Glen Dhu was not of the scrambling order of shooting lodges; but while all formality and stiffness were banished, it had all the little refined comforts of the most civilised life, but none of its tiresome

restraints,—the distance it was from the haunts of the crowd, and its isolation in wild scenery, forming an ample excuse for making it a charming liberty hall. Both the Addingtons knew how to make their guests comfortable; he was so good-natured and easy-going, and she quite understood how much to help to amuse them, and how much to leave them to themselves. Besides the drawing-room and conservatory there were on the ground-floor a billiard-room and library, and Charley's own den, so that there was plenty of room for a large party to make themselves happy in the wettest and most miserable weathers.

The luxuries of a bath and a comfortable bedroom were most acceptable after the journey; and while Wilfred was dressing he could not help thinking to himself that he had indeed fallen upon good quarters, and he was not at all disposed to grumble at finding that the party was so small, and that he would have the uninterrupted society of two ladies whom he liked so much, and who were both so pleasant to him, for some few days.

Dinner was late, but that was not a circumstance which disturbed the cook, accustomed to

the late hours of stalkers, and late returns from long expeditions, and the *cuisine* left nothing to be desired, while the waiting was perfect, and the wine Addington took a special pride in.

Being only six the conversation was quite general, and Sir Henry, by the side of Mrs. Addington, seemed to have quite forgotten the worries of the journey, and to have caught a little of the brilliance of his lively neighbour. They talked chiefly of the events of the past season, Mrs. Addington leading the way in the conversation; and when she touched upon the shortcomings or misfortunes of friends and acquaintance, which she did now and then regardless of Miss Featherstone's presence, she always appealed to Sir Henry, who, in spite of his propriety and solemnity, could not help smiling at the absurd way she often put things in her delight at drawing him out.

Lady Waldermere talked and laughed more than Wilfred had ever seen her do before, and he felt it almost impossible to believe that this gay brilliant woman, who seemed to delight in encouraging Mrs. Addington in her wildest ideas and stories, was the same whose sweet

face, lighted up with the glow from heaven of the rays of the setting sun, he had gazed at with such admiration so short a time before on the deck of the yacht.

The whole party seemed to be on excellent terms with each other and with themselves, and felt the comfortable calmness produced by an extremely good dinner, which they had thoroughly earned, when Mrs. Addington rose to go, saying to Charley, "Don't be long; I shall order coffee in the conservatory in twenty minutes, smoking allowed all over the house, Mr. St. John, but in the drawing-room only in the shape of cigarettes."

"Wilfred," said Charley, when they were gone, "I can strongly recommend the claret. We must keep out the damp here, and the true vintage of Bordeaux mixes not badly with the dew of the mountain. I always get my wine from Edinburgh up here—best claret going—straight from Bordeaux. I have some tappit hens in the cellar from the Johnstone's cave at Bordeaux, which we will broach when you have brought home a monster from the glen."

By the appointed twenty minutes they had

joined the ladies in the conservatory, which was softly lighted by lamps with rose-coloured shades, which shed a luxurious light over everything, while the fountain splashed in a low dreamy way behind them. Wilfred was seated on a large cushion at the feet of his two fair friends, who reposed in low arm-chairs, with their faces turned towards the wide door which looked out upon the sea. Through the pines the moonlight was sparkling and dancing on the water, and lighting up the rugged outline of the mountains that encircled the loch while all below was in deep shade. Lufra, the deer-hound, was stretched at full length fast asleep on the bear-skins, and on the door step Donald and Darroch, the two terriers, were dozing and nodding upon the lovely tranquil scene outside. Wilfred turned from the soft view and looked up from time to time as he was talking, into the bright animated face of Mrs. Addington, or into the soft melancholy one of Lady Waldermere, from which had now again disappeared all the expression of gaiety and lightness that it had worn at dinner.

Little by little the conversation seemed to die out, under the charm of the surrounding

flowers and soft light, and of the lovely scene outside, till at last, for a few minutes, they sat in silence.

“ A high bid for your thoughts, Lady Waldermere,” said Charley Addington, at last ruthlessly breaking the spell. “ If I may judge by that look of charming melancholy which I have been watching with rapture, they must be worth a large sum.”

“ I was not thinking,” she answered. “ I was dreaming, and dreaming that you had transported me into fairyland. When did you find the lamp of Alla-a-deen, that you have compelled the genius of it to plant this enchanted palace in the midst of the most beautiful wilds of Scotland. You have collected in this lonely scene before us the climate of Italy, and the flowers, fountains, and dim lights of an Arabian night’s dream ! ”

“ The genius who touched Glen Dhu with her wand is at your side,” he answered. “ I and Bessie both like to be comfortable, and I never do quarrel about her taste whatever other differences we may have.”

“ No, it was good enough for her to choose

you at any rate," said Lady Waldermere, laughing; "but so far it all seems to me to be perfect. Does it inspire the mind of the wandering troubadour lying at my feet? Does he dream of knights and ladies, or of old chieftains and border fights up here in the kingdom of the old Macdonalds and Macleods?"

"The humble minstrel would hardly venture to tune the strings of the wild harp of the north," answered Wilfred, "and he is sure that the imagination of Lady Waldermere can create far sweeter visions than any he could conjure up in these beautiful scenes, and that her dreams to-night will be far softer and sweeter than any which he could inspire."

"I think, my dear Hilda," said Mrs. Addington, "that it is almost time that you sought the scene of such dreams; it has already tolled the witching hour, and the partner of your joys and sorrows is in the arms of the dreamy god. Remember, that this is liberty hall, no fixed hours except for dinner, and that is often being shifted about, so I will see you to your door, and wish these good people sweet repose."

"I feel so comfortable I don't want at all

to move," said Lady Waldermere, slowly rousing herself, "but I suppose I must tear myself away from this enchanting scene. Good night, minstrel, and see if you cannot invoke the spirits of the loch and mountain to tell you some story worthy of the charms of Glen Dhu.

END OF VOL. I.

HILDA WALDERMERE.

HILDA WALDERMERE

A Novel.

by
SYDNEY MORGAN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

LONDON :
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HILDA.

CHAPTER I.

A BRILLIANT sun streamed into the windows of Wilfred's bedroom, and made late slumber impossible, so, after one look out of the window at the glorious view, he slipped on some clothes, and wandered out to have a swim in the clear waters of the loch. At the door he met old Lufra, who wished him a solemn good morning, while Donald and Darroch were more demonstrative, and, in their delight at finding any one to go out with them so early, welcomed him as though he was an old friend.

It was a most perfect summer's day, and the sun shone brilliantly on the same sea and mountains that he had gazed at with such admiration the evening before. But beautiful though it was now, it was entirely changed,

the light of the sun coming from the other side, reversed all the shadows, and seemed to alter even the shape of the mountains. Nothing was dark now, nothing gloomy and mysterious, all was bright and joyous, and even the grim old pines, with the dew drops of the night still glistening on the dark boughs, wore a smiling look in the morning sunshine. The little waves sparkled and danced, and the sea-birds flew backwards and forwards, with now and then a heron winging his solemn flight across the loch, as though they too could enjoy the delightful weather, while out in the middle of the loch a seal every now and then put up his black head to take a look round him.

Wilfred was soon swimming about in the cold clear water, with his rough companions sitting on a rock watching him, and having returned and completed his toilet, he wandered about the place till the rest of the party should appear. Donald and Darroch were in the best of spirits, and appeared to be bent on showing him the haunt of every rabbit on the place, with which they were quite familiar.

At last Charley Addington appeared on the lawn in front of the house, and called him in

to breakfast, where he found Sir Henry, and Mrs. Addington appeared in a few minutes, looking radiant in a light summer dress.

“Good morning, Sir Henry,” she said. “I have just paid a visit to your better half, and found the lazy thing was not yet out of bed; but I never saw any one look so fresh and pretty as she does. I thought it was only the privilege of children to wake up so bright and rosy.”

“I think she is tired after her journey,” answered Sir Henry, looking rather shocked at the idea of his wife’s appearance in bed being discussed before the party at the breakfast table. “She hoped you would excuse her being late this morning.”

“If she looks like that when she is tired,” said Mrs. Addington, amused at the look on Sir Henry’s face, “what must she be when she is fresh. Didn’t the old Queens of France, or some place, hold receptions in their beds in days gone by? I am sure if they looked like Hilda it must have been very trying to the feelings of the younger courtiers.”

“Perhaps it was only the old queens who did observe the custom,” said Wilfred, “and so the feelings of the young were spared.”

"I don't care what the old frumps did," she answered. "They would be wigged, and curled, and painted up for the exhibition. Fancy what a sight one or two ladies we know of in the world of fashion must be at that hour ! I heard of one that we all know who had a new maid who came in the morning for the first time to open the shutters of her bedroom, and when she turned and looked at the morning light streaming on the bed, she shrieked and had a fit."

"My dear Bessie," said Charley, "for heaven's sake spare us at this sacred hour of breakfast from such ideas. Had you been up long, Wilfred, when I saw you ?"

"Yes," he answered. "I had a dip in the loch and a walk round the 'demesne.' Your rough friends, Mrs. Addington, seem to share your feelings of hospitality, and the two small gentlemen took me to see all the rabbits in the place."

"They are sweet creatures," she said, "and such friends ; but they will fight desperately at times, then go out hunting, or curl up and go to sleep together after it, as though nothing had happened."

"An emblem of what the domestic bliss of

many of our friends is," observed Charley ; " but, then, among that class of creatures there are no indissoluble unions, and they can separate without any legal formalities, so they can afford to quarrel."

" My dear Addington," said Sir Henry, " please don't let us have any more allusions to separation, and to that disgraceful Court which is a blot upon our modern civilization. I trust I shall live to see it quite swept away, and the Church once more have the sole power over the holy state of matrimony."

" I'll drop the subject with all my heart if you like," answered Addington ; " but I did not know that, with all your practical sense, you would leave marriage entirely in the hands of the priests, and take it out of those of the civil law. I won't argue about it, but I must add that as long as the law has so much to do with tying the knot, I don't see why it should not have a voice in the untying of it, If it were only a matter of sentiment, however solemn, well and good, but settlements, children, and all the rest of it are matters of law, and the strange mixture of civility and religion in the matter always seems to me rather anomalous. But I have done with it

now, and we will talk of what is to be done to-day. Here comes the fair Miss Featherstone, what does she propose?" he added, as that young lady came into the room.

"We are talking about what to do to-day, Lily," said Mrs. Addington, "no one is going to shoot, and there is no water to fish in, so our three men are driven to take refuge in our society as a *pis-aller*, what would you like to do?"

"Oh! if I may propose," replied the young lady, settling herself down at the table, "I should like to visit some of the scenes where Prince Charlie wandered with Flora Macdonald. I am told it was all about here."

"You shall visit them all if you like, Miss Featherstone," said Charley; "caves, rocks, and everything. I suppose you are an admirer of that unprincipled adventurer, who seemed to have the bump of admiration for your beautiful sex most unfairly developed."

"I knew you were sure to run him down, Mr. Addington," she answered, "but I do admire him, and his chivalrous character in his struggles to obtain his own; and all the

devotion of his followers is, I am sure, a proof of what he was."

"Of the fascination of his manners, and their desire to get something in the general scramble," said Charley Addington. "But he was a real favourite with beautiful women, only unfortunately, he, like the rest of the Stuarts, was always making love to some pretty woman at the moment he was wanted for some important business. Yet I am not sure he wasn't right, and I have no doubt he had a very good time of it altogether."

"I'm not going to argue with you, Mr. Addington, because I want to eat my breakfast, and because you only scoff, but nothing you say would shake me in my love and admiration for the Stuarts," answered Miss Featherstone.

"I feel no doubt of it, Miss Featherstone," he said, "you could not be a woman if your opinion on any subject could be changed by talking. Don't you know the sage's definition of a woman? A creature not open to conviction by argument, and that pokes the fire from the top!"

"Never mind about poking the fire on a hot summer's day," said his wife, "but let us settle where we go, or how."

"I think the ponies could take you round to the point, and the cave," said he, "where tradition says, the bonnie Prince passed such a romantic and uncomfortable time with the fair Flora. We had enough of the yacht yesterday, so the ponies will be a change, and if you like to take luncheon with us we can do it very pleasantly by starting about twelve or half past."

"Well, I'll see what Lady Waldermere says, and then we'll let you all know in half an hour," said Mrs. Addington.

Lady Waldermere was quite ready to mount a pony and visit the spots that tradition had sanctified by connecting them with Prince Charlie, and by half past twelve they were all on their way, Mrs. Addington leading, and Sir Henry by her side on a very sedate-looking pony. Addington and Wilfred preferred walking, and the former was following by the side of Miss Featherstone's pony, alternately chaffing her, and telling her stories about the Highlands, and about Prince Charlie, for the facts of which he made a heavy call upon his imagination; while the latter brought up the rear by the side of Lady Waldermere.

They were soon away from the pine woods that surrounded the house, and following the track that wound higher up the mountains, and along the side of the loch. Every now and then they crossed a small burn, now only a little stream trickling over the path, and looking but little like the dusky torrent that could roar down after a storm.

The path lay along the hill-side, through bracken and heather, bright and gay in the summer sun, with the breeze fanning their cheeks, in the glorious combination of pure mountain and sea-air. At their feet, now far below, was the rock-bound coast, with the little fishing village scattered along the edge of the water, the light breeze just ruffled the sparkling surface of the sea, and the mountains round the loch glowed a brilliant purple with their heather in full bloom under the rich August sun. Above them, on the other side, towered the mountains in masses of grey rock, and at times seemed to go for two or three thousand feet into the air straight over their heads.

Once or twice they came in sight of deer feeding, first of about a dozen hinds with their calves, who did not see them till they

had watched them for some minutes, when an old hind lifted up her head and spied the distant party; she gave one signal and the whole herd was bounding along up the ridge of the mountain. At another time they came upon four stags together, two lying dozing in the sun on the rocks, and two browsing round them. They looked at them for soon time, and the two ghillies who were with them, soon told them how many points they had, and that two of them were quite clean, that is, had rubbed all the velvet off their horns. Presently one lifted up his head, gave them a defiant look, and the four trotted away up the mountain in a dignified way, the last they saw of them being their clear outline against the deep-blue sky as they were walking slowly along the sky line.

Lady Waldermere had been contemplating the scenery for some little time, when she said to Wilfred, "How different this is from anything I had expected of the Western Highlands! I had heard so much of perpetual bad weather, and dark, rough scenery. Here all is soft and bright, and the sky and sea are of a blue worthy of Naples. As for the house, people talk of shooting-lodges and

making them inhabitable; but I know few country-houses in England so comfortable as Glen Dhu. Why, last night we might have been taking part in a moonlight scene at the Opera, or on a visit to the three ladies of Bagdad in the reign of good King Haroun Al Raschid. Do you remember our disappointment when we first started in the yacht from Balmacara?"

"Yes," answered Wilfred, "and how soon we changed our minds about the beauty of the place; our first impressions were not very correct on that occasion. But thinking of our discussion on the subject, I often think it would be very interesting if we could know what the first impressions of us were on those whom we became very intimate with afterwards."

"I think," she said, "that it would be very hard to say what they were. We are so apt to colour our recollection of these impressions, by our late experience, and unless something had marked these first impressions very strongly, I don't think that our account of them would be worth much. I confess I very much distrust, in auto-biographies and personal narratives, all the accounts of early

ideas and impressions. I am sure that they are nearly always, more than half, only the reflection of later experience."

"I often think," said he, "that friendship is never at all near perfection, till we have come to the degree of intimacy when we can discuss the past, and our mutual impressions without any reserve, and when we have found an intellect in our friend that is to us really worth holding intercourse with."

"You are imagining the ideal companion," she answered. "I don't know if you mean man or woman; but if woman, do you think that when you had found your ideal princess, you could hold your intercourse with her, and keep your heart quite untouched?"

"My heart has long since ceased to trouble me," he answered; "it may beat a trifle quicker after a charming waltz, but it is the exercise of the dance, and not the charm of the partner that causes its emotion. I am not going to say that I don't believe in love, that would be absurd, but I have long since got over the fancies of my early days, and I don't much believe in feeling them again; and I believe I am in earnest when I say I don't

wish to. I know that I am in earnest when I say that if I thought I were in danger of caring much for any woman, I would fly far away from her. I have seen love cause so much misery, and so little happiness, that I have no wish to risk my bark on its stormy waters. It may give hours of intense happiness, but they are nearly always paid for by months and years of misery. And by some strange anomaly of nature, the most sensitive and the most passionate seem nearly always to fix their affections on the wrong person. No, Lady Waldermere, the best way to go through life is to enjoy its good things as they come in our way, not to be more selfish than one can help, and to steer clear of the shoals and quicksands that beset the bark launched on the sea of love. Those go best through the world, I believe, who cannot feel these intense pleasures and pains, and those who can feel had better avoid them. The risk is too great. The prize of obtaining what we really love, and can love, comes to so few, and the bitterness is so great of seeing what our happiness might be, and what it never can be, that it is not worth the risk."

"You speak very earnestly," said Lady

Waldermere, "and such a strange mixture of Epicurean philosophy and bitterness, — have you ever felt so much of the bitterness which you talk of so savagely?"

"I! Lady Waldermere," he answered. "No, not I! I had my loves and my hopes and fears in days long gone by, but my little disappointments and disenchantments were not of the kind to cause the bitterness of which I speak; it hardly comes at a very early stage of life, and scarcely ever, with men, till the romance of youth is passed over. And for the rest, I often doubt if I am one of those who are capable of the very deep feelings I have been talking about. The loves of my youth were both pleasant and painful at the time, but they succeeded one another tolerably rapidly, and then departed altogether. I have sometimes since tried if I could not get up a little sentiment, and when I have almost succeeded I find myself building up a new romance about the next pair of bright eyes I sit looking into, so that I feel I must give it up as in vain."

"But still you, like the intimate society of women, don't you?" said Lady Waldermere.

"I like it particularly," he answered; "and

not only because I think it is always pleasant to be near a pretty woman, but because I think that very often a clever intellectual woman is a brighter and more sympathetic companion than a man. I think she is quicker at catching a train of idea in another, and is often more original than a man."

"Then, if that is your opinion," said she, "how do you account for it that men as a rule affect to despise women as companions, and women's judgment? I have heard even clever men declare that they do not consider women are ever real companions to men, that they are only the amusement, or the worry of his less serious hours; in fact, merely a necessary part of his domestic circle."

"I could account for it," he answered, "by saying men who assert that, though they may be clever in some things, are not so in really understanding character. They start with the foregone conclusion that woman is an inferior animal, and they have no natural sympathy for her, and no power of drawing her out. They are often in their hearts afraid of her quickness of perception, and so start by snubbing her at once. Those men very often have a little secret mistrust of the creature they

affect so much to despise. But I think too that there is a strong reason, which is, that so very often the women who have sufficient intellect to be companions to any men, are so narrow-minded, so ill-educated, and have their judgment so warped, that they cannot follow them at all. Their minds run in such a little narrow groove, and they have such a total absence of independence of thought, that it is often impossible to make them grasp a new idea."

"For one thing," said she, "I think that women, and particularly English women, are so intensely conventional, and they have such a horror of anything that is original or unconventional in a woman. If a woman makes herself at all remarkable by her writing, or by anything else she does, very well, other women regard her as rather more of a curious animal than a woman, and certainly not as a lady, who the greater part of them seem to think must be feeble, and that she is better rather ignorant and foolish."

"Yes," he observed, "I am sure a great many regard a woman, particularly clever or gifted, as a sort of monstrosity, a dangerous animal, whom they would rather not have in their

houses. I am sure the greater number of both men and women don't believe in highly educating women. They say it unfits them for their proper duties, which they consider to be those of a sort of upper domestic animal,—to mind the house and the meals, increase the population, and talk on the shortcomings of their neighbours, and, by the unmerciful way they abuse any slips of theirs, to act as a sort of social police to keep each other straight. But if a woman ever attempts to raise her mind to any question of politics beyond the narrow boundary set by her husband or family, or of religion beyond the hard and fast line of the priest she has been taught to follow, immediately they all cry out, she is going out of her proper sphere, and they are all of them down upon her at once."

"Then, you agree with me that want of education and conventional ideas do so much to suppress women?" said Lady Waldermere.

"Yes I do," he answered, "and till there is a little more liberality of idea on the subject they can advance but slowly.

"But," said she, "are you an upholder of the woman's rights doctrines? Would you

like to see women mix more in general life?"

"Not at all," he answered; "my idea of a woman's rights is that she should have, as far as possible, as good and as liberal an education as a man. The rest will then take care of itself. To my idea, woman's mission in the world is to influence, more than to act in it. An intellectual woman has an immense power in the world if she has cultivated her intellect, and cared to use her tongue for anything but to talk fashions and babies, and to take away her neighbours' characters. I like a woman to be very womanly. Physically she can never compete with men, and it is her comparative physical weakness that gives her such influence over men. If she attempts to mount the platform or the stump, and to proclaim her ideas in public, she at once shows her weakness, though experience has shown that there are many things in daily life which women are fitted for, though not for all (but I am not speaking now of ways of earning their bread and of occupation); and it is this craving of some foolish women to compete with men in everything that has made the idea of the elevation of woman

ridiculous. As soon as a woman makes herself absurd, she naturally loses her influence. But I am making a great speech, Lady Waldermere, and I fear boring you; a mountain path in the Highlands seems a strange place to discuss woman's rights and woman's mission."

"No," she answered, "you both interest and amuse me, and the beauty of the scenery does not make the place at all unfit for an interesting conversation. But I am really interested in what you say about the narrowness of women's minds, and their frivolous and one-sided education. You see I am more than half a foreigner, and was not brought up in any particular groove, so that I watch all women as a sort of outsider."

"I should very much like to know your ideas," said Wilfred; "and if it is not impertinent, I should like very much to know where you spent your early days, that you say you were not brought up in any particular groove."

"I don't mind in the least telling you if it interests you," she answered; "so to begin with, my mother was an American, from the Southern States. I dare say you did not even know that, and my father, who was an English-

man, died before I can remember him. My mother hardly ever came to England, though my brother was at school here, and came abroad in the holidays, and I was at one time at school in France, and then was in America with my mother for some time. Then we lived in Italy, and I was from a child used to all sorts of society, and never was considered a child as far as I can make out. Then, you know, by American ideas, girls are allowed more liberty than even in England, and my mother did not at all think that you taught a girl self-respect or self-control by shutting her up. She taught me early to respect myself, and I have always found that when both men and women have seen that I have learnt that, they have shown that they could do the same, so that I have never had to regret my liberty, or make any one have to do so for me. Then, in those early days, I was thrown into the company of many distinguished and clever men, and as they were kind enough to treat me indulgently, I found their society much pleasanter than that of stupider people, and I got into the habit of thinking much for myself. Then I married abroad very young, and for the first two or three years we went on living

the same sort of life, so I used to see a great variety of characters; and since I came to England, though I conform to all the habits here, I have never been able to adopt the ideas, and I look upon everything English as by no means so perfectly infallible as is the custom with so many islanders. I am often amused to hear both men and women whose knowledge of foreign countries consists of a tour or two, and who have spoken to two or three chance people at the *table d'hôte*,—they tell you that Englishwomen are perfection, that their words, their manners, their education, and their liberality of mind are unequalled. I grant them a great deal, but it amuses me to hear them comparing them with what they know nothing of. I was too young to reflect much in those days, but I filled my mind with much food for subsequent reflection. Do you think now that I have a little right to say I was not brought up in a groove?"

"Certainly I do," he answered, "and I cannot say how much what you tell me interests me, but won't you tell me more of what you think of my countrywomen?"

"But," said she, "your countrywomen are

mine too, and I am not going to sit in judgment on them. I am only making remarks in passing, but it comes back to what we were both saying,—the great advantage of a liberal education, and cosmopolitan ideas. I think it such an advantage for people to be brought up with as few prejudices as possible.”

“Then I quite agree with you,” said he, “and people here are so often confusing principles and prejudices, that the latter have more often than not to ‘do’ duty for the former. They lay such a stress on what are nothing but prejudices, till they make them into principles, and then they are impressed upon wretched children till they are taught to consider what may be only class or sectarian ideas, as the ruling principles of life, and their minds are never freed again from the shackles of them. As you have encouraged me to tell you what I think on the subject, I am not afraid of going on. Of course, I see how hard it is for it to be otherwise. You cannot give every one a cosmopolitan education, and every country, every little circle of society, has its narrowing influences; minds are cramped by rules of manners and etiquette, and the nonsense of little social distinctions which ought

to be learnt insensibly instead of taught ; but taught they are by many as much more important than really serious things. The joke of a thing being worse than wicked, because it is vulgar, is only too true ; while in religion narrow views, instead of high and noble ideas, are taught, dogma and doctrine instead of the lofty and grand principles of Christianity ; true nobility of mind is swept away, and often nothing is left but a mean and selfish religion, which, ignoring all the great duties of humanity, thinks of nothing but its own miserable self. Partly from the wandering life I have led, and partly from the natural turn of my mind, I have cut myself adrift from many of the ideas which I had imbibed in my youth, and so changed myself, advanced, I think, that I find it sometimes hard to be tolerant to those I have left behind me. I often try to see if I am unfair on them, and if I have rushed into other snares, but I cannot see that I have, and I sincerely hope that I am in truth more charitable than many who profess to consider charity their first duty. But my love of freedom of thought and of liberal education has carried me away, Lady Waldermere, and you will think that I am

going to mount my stump, and tell you how the world is to be governed."

"Not at all," she answered, "and if you do, it will only interest and amuse me. I honestly do like to hear what a man thinks. I am sure there are so many, who, like the poor woman you have been talking about, can only run in a groove, and never think for themselves at all. And I find many men who fancy that they must have a particular style of conversation for women, and end by being very tedious and talking a great deal of nonsense. I often feel so inclined to tell them to try to bring their intellect up to mine, instead of endeavouring to make it lower than nature has already made it. Then those heaps of compliments, of which some men's whole talk is made up, spoil their own effect. If they were nicely put in here and there, and more implied than expressed, they would seem much more spontaneous, and therefore be much more valuable. Of course every woman likes being flattered,—and man too for that matter,—if it is nicely done, but, like tickling, it must be done lightly and judiciously. Now how much more really flattering it is for a clever man to show he likes talking to a woman

sensibly, by doing so, than by only telling her how he likes it, and how clever she is. If she has any brains she soon sees that he pays her the compliment of thinking her a fool. I don't think that even the most foolish of us are such fools as some men choose to think us, and treat us for."

"No," he answered, "I think the cleverer a man really is, the more he will suit his conversation to his listener. But there are, I regret to say, many silly women in the world; and I have sometimes heard a very clever man throwing the pearls of his conversation before,—well, some one who could not understand them,—because she had a pretty face."

"Oh! of course that may happen," she observed, "but it does not often, and is a fault on quite the right side, as even you will allow?"

"Certainly I do," he answered, "for I think that it is this disparagement of women by men which keeps back their education, in its higher sense, and discourages so many from trying to use their intellects a little more. So many are bent only on pleasing men, and in struggling up, or maintaining their footing on the social ladder, that in the abstract they don't

care one button for higher things and nobler thoughts, and only look upon the cultivation of them by the light of their price in their particular market."

"So, you see," said Lady Waldermere, "that you come back to blaming men for the deficiency of women."

"Only working back to the cause," said Wilfred, "we began with the effect, which is, to use a strong word, the degradation of women; we work back to the cause of it, the inability of men to appreciate their elevation, the different shades and views of it don't affect the general idea. I think I'm right, Lady Waldermere?"

"Yes, as applied to our particular society, you seem to be," she replied, "but still I think that I have lived in my life in society where a clever woman was not unappreciated."

"And I hope may again," he added, "but then you must remember that I have been talking of the world at large, and not of individual instances. I should not talk like this if I did not think that I myself could really appreciate and enjoy the society of a clever and well-educated woman, even without being an unusually clever man," he added, laughing.

"Then I hope you have enjoyed mine without its being that of an unusually clever woman," she replied, "but we must make some plan for the improvement of intellectual cultivation among women, only I decline to join the 'shrieking sisterhood' in any shape whatever; but it would be very nice to be a regenerator of society, and to infuse a little intellect into the rubbish that is generally talked,—only you will let me stop short of being blue?"

"Not," he answered, laughing, "if I thought you would encase those tiny feet I see peeping out now and then in the garment referred to of that colour, for the fashion would then spread, and having once highly educated the generation, it would be easy enough to moderate the depth of the shade in the blue afterwards; we might have dark blues, and light blues, azures, and all sorts of tints to suit the capacity of men."

"Well, we'll consult Mrs. Addington, who, I see, with my husband has planted herself at what looks like the edge of an awful precipice. I suppose the cave is somewhere near, for I see the basket of luncheon is being unpacked, so I hope your walk, and long discourse upon women, have made you hungry, Mr. St. John."

By this time they had come up to the rest of the party, who had got off their ponies and were preparing to rest, and attend to the important event of luncheon.

“Miss Featherstone has come to the conclusion that it was very improper conduct in Flora Macdonald to wander about with Prince Charlie, and live in the caves down below with him,” said Charley Addington.

“No, Mrs. Addington, I have not,” she cried, “but he has been talking all sorts of nonsense.”

“I only asked her if she should like to wander about with the Prince of Wales for a week or two, and try a taste of cave life with him, and she says it is quite a different thing.”

“You know what I mean,” said Miss Featherstone.

“Upon my life, I don’t; both were princes, young, good-looking and interesting, only one has the advantage of being now alive, and I am happy to say with a better chance, as well as better claim, to the throne of England.”

“I fancy that if His Royal Highness were to take to wandering,” said Mrs. Addington, “Floras would not be wanting. The instinct

of loyalty has not quite died out, nor the taste for a little of the society of princes, as more than one fair lady could tell."

"Well, they show their taste," said Charley, "for prince or no prince, I honestly think he is the pleasantest man at the Marlborough, and I rather agree with the fair ladies in their choice."

"But where is the cave all this time?" asked Miss Featherstone of Mrs. Addington.

"I really don't know, my dear Lily," replied that lady, "I have never seen it."

"Never seen it!" she cried in astonishment, "and it all belonging to you. Well, I cannot understand that."

"My curiosity in such matters is not great," said the lady, "and it looks such a scramble down to it that I prefer imagining it, as there is no nice prince to entice me there."

"You'd scramble quickly enough, Bessie," said her regardless husband, "if there was only a prince to flirt with down there."

"Never you mind what I would, or would not do, if there were a prince down there. I have two very agreeable gentlemen up here to talk to without flirting, so you can

go down below and play your bonnie namesake with Lily Featherstone, while we sit and rest here."

They had luncheon under the shade of a great rock, looking over a wild rocky coast below, and far away south to Ardnamurchan running out into the sea. Opposite were the rocky islands that guard the west coast of Scotland, the two Uists, a name quite unpronounceable to Saxon lips, Skye, with its glorious 'Coolin' Mountains, and away north Raasy and Rona, with the blue outline of more distant islands beyond them.

"This is a glorious view, Mrs. Addington," said Wilfred, after he had been for some minutes contemplating it in a meditative way, with the leg of a chicken in his hand; "it was worth coming here this morning, cave and prince, or no cave and prince."

"It is a perfect view," said Lady Waldermere. "I cannot think why your sea is so blue here; and this looks like a dense forest below us; from the sea yesterday it looked like stunted underwood. The brackens too are wonderful; I don't think I ever saw any so thick and tall, Roderick Dhu's men could well have hidden in brackens such as these. And what are those

very rugged mountains in the island opposite? I never saw such a broken and rough outline anywhere else, and so clear cut against the deep blue sky."

"That's Coolin, as Sir Walter calls it," said Charley, "or Cuhellin as they pronounce it, as near as I can say it, and at the foot of it is Loch Corruisk or Corriskin,—the immortal bard was not very proud about how he twisted the crackjaw names of his native wilds to suit his verse. You must remember the description of the lake and mountain in the 'Lord of the Isles'; no description can be wilder than the reality; we must take you there some day in the yacht. We can run her close in, and there is only half a mile of narrow glen to walk along to the lake."

They finished their luncheon looking at the distant landscape, and talking, and at last Miss Featherstone insisted on being taken down to the cave. Charley Addington made Wilfred come too, and the way was shown by the younger of the two ghillies, who jumped from rock to rock like a goat as he went at a break-neck pace they did not attempt to follow.

At last they returned warm and out of breath, but even Miss Featherstone's enthu-

siasm could not make her say it was a tempting place for a night, even with the bonnie Prince Charlie. They found Sir Henry smoking a meditative cigar with the two ladies, and after they had done the same and rested awhile, they turned their steps back homewards. They had lingered so long that to-night they had all the beauties of the sunset, only seen from the mountain instead of the loch, and they could not help agreeing, that from each new point of view they saw it all from, it looked more beautiful than from the last.

Another pleasant dinner succeeded, and another quiet evening in the conservatory, with all its enchantments of flowers, lights, and splashing fountains, while in front again was the moonlight flickering on the sea through the pines, and Donald and Darroch dozing side by side on the doorstep.

CHAPTER II.

THE time went by most pleasantly at Glen Dhu. The weather continued very hot and dry, so that fishing was a farce, and stalking was a real work of labour. The party amused themselves by little expeditions both on land and in the yacht, and in teaching Lady Waldermere and Miss Featherstone to throw a fly, though the water was so low and clear that nothing but the smallest trout would condescend to look at it, while the salmon who were up only showed their dark backs as they lazily rolled about at the bottom of the clear pools. Mrs. Addington could throw a fly well, and play a fish not amiss, so she quite despised the idea of flogging the water for nothing, and the amusement was more an excuse for sitting by the beautiful streams dashing among the rocks,

when the midges would permit, than any idea of sport. The little party had several days together before any additions to it were to join it, so that they became more and more intimate. They were so small a party that it was not possible to split up much, but Sir Henry always turned his attention particularly to Mrs. Addington, and the active body and readiness to do anything of Miss Featherstone rather united her to Charley Addington. She was a bright pretty girl of about twenty, one of a large family, and her mother was an old friend of Mrs. Addington's family, so she used to take her about a good deal as they were not very rich, and she always looked to providing a husband for her in one of her cast-off admirers. She had warned Wilfred particularly that he was not to play the fool with her, by making love, or putting nonsense into her head, that at present she was what is called a good sensible girl who was likely to make a sensible marriage, and be a blessing to her family. The gentleman warned was so much more amused by Mrs. Addington and Lady Waldermere that he was not in danger of devoting much more of his time and energies to Miss Lily Featherstone

than civility required, and he was not so heartless as to pit his experience of the world and of woman against her ignorance and inexperience merely to amuse a passing moment.

The result was that Wilfred St. John was thrown a great deal into the company of Lady Waldermere, and day by day grew to know her better and to like her more. They had many long discussions and upon all sorts of subjects, and he was often astonished at the amount she had read, and at her knowledge of all sorts of subjects that did not generally interest women. But in spite of the intimacy between them, he never felt that he saw deep into her. She seldom expressed opinions except upon trivial questions, and never talked about herself or her own inner feelings. Her real character, her inner life, was as much a mystery to him as ever, her feelings towards her not very interesting husband, and to every one else in particular, he had no clue to whatever. Never in his life had he come across any one who, without any appearance whatever of being guarded or reserved, displayed so little of her private feelings. And yet she must have them; he felt sure that one so clever, with so unusual an experience of

the world, must have very strong feelings on many subjects which it would be most interesting to know. The more he saw of her the deeper his interest in her became, and he often tried to draw her out upon the past, but quite in vain,—she always answered him as though she had had no past, and as though there was nothing underneath whatever. For years she had been the centre of a crowd of admirers, but as far as he could learn, she never seemed to have favoured any one more than another,—she,—one of the prettiest and most attractive of women—if not *the* prettiest and most attractive—he had ever known, seemed to be indifferent to the admiration of every one. Whenever she alluded to her husband, it was without any expression of any sort; it was simply as her husband, and nothing more was to be gathered from what she might say. The more he knew her, the more of an enigma did she become to him, while as far as she was concerned, on the other hand, though she seemed really to enjoy his society, and take an interest in all he said, it was an interest which appeared to him rather to diminish than to increase. It was with a feeling of pain that this idea struck him now and then, but he never

detected anything more marked in her manner ; there was just sufficient to prevent their intimacy becoming any greater, or his thinking that she intended to show any strong particular friendship for him.

At times there was a side of her character that showed itself, which he could not understand at all, for she would talk and laugh as though she were the most gay and frivolous of women, and would encourage Mrs. Addington in her strongest and wildest stories and ideas. What was real ? and what was put on ? The question often puzzled him, and he hoped, now he was so much interested in her, that time would show him.

As the days passed on his interest in her only increased, and though the time had passed so rapidly and pleasantly since they travelled up to Scotland together, it seemed on looking back as though weeks instead of days had gone by since then.

At last the time came when they were to have an addition to the party, and the yacht had gone to Balmacara for the new arrivals. They were to consist of Sir Percy Fitzroy, and Mrs. Henderson, Colonel and Mrs. Macdonald, whom Wilfred had met at the Adding-

tons' in London, and a young gentleman named Evelyn, whose christian name was Freddy, but it had been almost lost sight of, as he was known by hardly any one as anything but Monkey Evelyn, or the Monkey. He was of youthful years, and in a light cavalry regiment, in which, though practical joking was carried to the perfection of a science, he was easily ahead of all his brother officers in his power of imagining strange things, and in his recklessness in carrying them out.

Wilfred was sitting, on the afternoon of this the last day of their seclusion, by the side of Lady Waldermere under the trees on the lawn. The tide was out in front of them, and they could see the wide expanse of sand, and the hosts of sea-birds flying backwards and forwards over it. It was a dreamy sleepy sort of afternoon, and they had not been talking much. The rest of the party had gone their different ways, and had left the couple sitting there alone.

At length Wilfred said to her. "So at last our quiet life is to be disturbed; it was too pleasant to last long."

"Don't you like to see new faces?" she answered. "I think it would become very dull

to have always the same thing, and never any novelty."

"I don't care much about novelty," he said, "when I have got what I am most happy with; and our little party has to me been so charming that I resent any interference with it. I could have wished it prolonged indefinitely."

"But do you call the addition of old friends to it an interference?" said she. "I thought that Mrs. Henderson was such an old friend of yours; it's very shocking of you to suggest that her arrival can be a bore."

"Mrs. Henderson is a very old friend of mine" he answered, "and in herself I am always glad to see her, but,—I can hardly tell you why,—I have enjoyed the last few days so very much that I am sorry that even she is coming to break the spell."

"I shall feel bound to tell her," said Lady Waldermere, laughing, "of the very unloyal sentiments that her old admirer has been uttering, and she will call you severely to account."

"I dare say you can make a pretty joke of it," said Wilfred, rather put out at the way she chose to chaff him about his sentimental remark, "but there are times in our lives when our dearest friends might be *de trop*."

"Much more those who are only outsiders," said she; "shall I go, and leave you plenty of room with Mrs. Henderson? Then we have Sir Percy coming; he is always amusing to listen to, and pleasant to look at. You like him, don't you?"

"You know I like them all in their way," said Wilfred getting angry, "but I only said that *I* for my part had so much enjoyed the past few days that I was sorry they were to be disturbed, but as you, Lady Waldermere, seem to be getting bored, I am glad for your sake that a relief has come."

"Thanks," she answered; "I will try to make the best of it, and in a week I will tell you which I like the best, the larger, or the unadulterated and original party."

"Well, I am sorry," said he, very much nettled, "that you have been so dull, for you speak as though the past ten days had been not at all agreeable."

"And you, Mr. St. John, speak as though the next were to be anything but pleasant; now I take a more hopeful view of the subject, and look forward to some little pleasure still at Glen Dhu."

"I see, Lady Waldermere," said Wilfred,

getting up from his chair, "that you mean to misunderstand everything I say this afternoon, so I had better depart; and I shall take a walk over the hills till dinner, and prepare my speeches for Mrs. Henderson, while you listen to Sir Percy, who will amuse you much better than I have been able to. Here, Donald! Darroch!" he called to the two rough terriers, "come for a walk, and you shall hunt, while I compose my conversation."

"Bon voyage! Mr. St. John," said Lady Waldermere, calling after him as he strode away evidently much out of humour, but he pretended not to hear, and did not turn round again.

He walked away into the hills, and set off straight up the mountain above the house. She remained sitting where she was, gazing into far distance over the wet sands, while the sun sank lower and lower in the heaven. Upon her beautiful face there was an expression of deep melancholy, and once or twice a tear hung upon the long lashes of her soft eyes. At last she rose with a sigh, gave a look up at the mountain and went into the house.

Wilfred climbed the mountain with rapid

steps, higher and higher as though he was anxious to escape from something. And just then it was his own self, whom he would have liked to escape from, and a sense of anger and annoyance he would have been puzzled to put into words. Hurt and annoyed he certainly was, not so much at what Lady Waldermere had said, but at the way she had said it. It seemed to him that after all their delightful and intimate companionship of the past week, she was resolved to show him that it meant nothing really intimate of any sort, and she had turned at once into a joke his attempt at expressing any regret that such days of intimacy had come to an end. He had not even tried to say anything in the least sentimental, yet she had nipped his words so quickly. "At least," he thought "she does not regret it. I have no doubt she is tired of me and glad of a change, and why shouldn't she be? What a fool I was! I was beginning to think she really liked me, and took an interest in me, and after all it was only *pour passer le temps*, and her show of interest was only civility, when she must have been often bored with me."

And then he fell to thinking of the past

few days, and his steps grew slower and slower, till at last he threw himself down on a rock covered with a soft bed of heather, from which he could command a view of the loch, and the mountains round it, and, far below, of the gables of the house, and there on the lawn at one side of it, through the pine-trees, he could catch a glimpse of the light dress of the lady he had just left so angrily, and was now thinking about. Then as he lay there, and looked from time to time down to the lawn below, and then away to the distant blue sea, he lived over again in his mind the past two weeks, and a dreamy sense of how delightful they had been stole over him, and how that happiness had now suddenly come to an end ! It was like all his past life, momentary pleasure, hope, and continual disappointment. Then he wandered farther away, back to London, and to all his new friends, who seemed now such old ones. He thought of all the little incidents of their life together, of that first pleasant day on the river, and of the admiration even then he had felt for Lady Waldermere, of all their other meetings, and then of his stay at Folkestone with Mrs. Addington ; and he could not help remembering

now with almost a feeling of surprise, the sort of sentimental alliance that had sprung up between them, far, far more intimate than anything he had approached to with Lady Waldermere, and of the way she had laid open to him the hopes and disappointments of her earlier life, both unmarried and married, and of the way he had pitied her and sympathised with her. And now even that, though only a month ago, seemed so very far away. But what was this feeling that he was troubled with now, surely he was not beginning to care too much for Lady Waldermere! The thought came upon him with a shock, but he soon put it away as quite absurd. She had interested him, very deeply interested him; he felt that never before in his life had he been thrown in such a way with so very charming a woman, and perhaps if it had gone on, and he had felt she had cared in some way a little for him, it might have become dangerous, but now she had herself broken the spell,—she had shown him that he was to her only a chance acquaintance, whom she had condescended to be pleased with for a time, but who, when that time was over must make way for another, and now that other

had come. Then without his being able to help it, a pang of jealousy of Sir Percy Fitzroy came over him. Perhaps it was him she was really glad to see again. What more possible? What more likely? He was, as she said, very good-looking, and there was no doubt that he was unusually clever and agreeable; what an ass he was not to have thought of it before! But after all, what on earth did it matter to him? What were either of them to him that he should care? He had looked on at hundreds of flirtations in his life before, of all kinds, with interest and amusement, and here now was one more. He would not make a fool of himself in his old age; why should he be piqued or put out? Lady Waldermere was still a most charming acquaintance, he had never he was sure shown her any sign of regarding her as any more, and he never would, for he should never think of her as any more, so he would calmly dismiss all jealousy and vexation from his mind.

And there he lay in the light of the afternoon sun, with that magnificent scene around him, for a long time quite unconscious of it, while all these thoughts were chasing each

other through his mind. Every now and then he cast his eyes down, and still he saw the white gleam of a dress on the lawn. At last he looked and it was gone, and in his heart there seemed a sudden void ; but he was not going to worry himself any more, he would rest there, giving himself up to a sense of solitude and repose, with those grand rocks around him, and wait till he saw the yacht in sight, and then he should have plenty of time to be at the landing-place to welcome the newcomers. His two small companions had given up the hope of finding anything to hunt in those lofty regions, and had gone to sleep near him, while he waited on, lying on his soft bed of heather, till at last he saw the blue smoke of the yacht against the deeper blue of the sea, just outside the loch. Then up he jumped and a rapid scramble down the mountain chased away all remains of past annoyance for the present, and he was waiting on the shore with Charley Addington to receive the travellers.

They all came together as expected, and not having had to wait for honeymooning horses at Strom Ferry, were in better time than the last party had been.

At dinner Wilfred found himself by Mrs. Henderson, and on the other side of the table was Lady Waldermere with Sir Percy Fitzroy by her side.

Mrs. Henderson was in tremendous spirits, the mountain and sea air seemed to have got into her head, and she soon set to work to find out everything that Wilfred had been doing since they parted, and she even condescended to chaff him very gently about his going to Folkestone with Mrs. Addington, till he in return began to chaff her about Frank Digby having gone off yachting with a very *mauvais sujet* friend, instead of coming to meet her at Glen Dhu.

"Oh! I am afraid that was my fault," she said, "I was rather hard on him just before we left London. I scolded him more than perhaps I intended for a story he told me; and he said if I did not write to say I had forgiven him, he should not come here, but I never thought he would take me at my word."

"Well, that's very naughty of you," answered Wilfred, much amused at the ingenuousness of the fair widow. "I don't think we ought to forgive you for keeping away one of our most agreeable companions,

but though we must punish you somehow, we must try to fill his place. I shall ask Mrs. Addington and Lady Waldermere what your punishment is to be."

"Oh, no!" said she, "you must not say anything to them about it; Frank Digby would not like it, and it would not be fair, but I am sorry he has not come."

"You have at least brought some one to help keep us going in that young gentleman, who is making such a noise up there with Mrs. Addington," said he.

"Yes, I never saw such a boy," she answered, "he was playing tricks the whole way up. He kept the guards running about, and frightened an old gentleman who was in the next carriage to ours nearly into a fit by banging a coat against his window, and shrieking for help. I was afraid he would stop the train, and at the Inverness Hotel you never heard such a scrimmage as he made with the chambermaids; it was quite scandalous, and then he insisted on kissing the oldest and most sedate, who came to remonstrate with him; he'll do something extraordinary while he is here, I'm sure."

And so they went on chattering away all

dinner time, while opposite to them Wilfred could not help watching Sir Percy, who was seated next to Lady Waldermere. She, on meeting him in the drawing-room before dinner, had shown no sign whatever of remembering that he had left her in a huff that afternoon, and was just as bright and amusing as ever, and seemed exactly the same towards him, which only, he thought, showed the more the utter indifference she felt to what he might feel or think about her.

Sir Percy had followed her and Charley Addington in to dinner with Mrs. Macdonald, and had seated himself by her, and as soon as he could was talking to her in the soft confidential manner he knew so well how to put on, and was making the best use of his dark expressive eyes. He seemed to intend to monopolise her again at once, and when they went into the delightful conservatory where they had spent so many pleasant evenings, he planted himself at her side, and assumed an air of perfect possession. Wilfred could not help watching to see how she took it all, but she was just as inscrutable now as ever, and while she talked and listened, now serious, and now breaking into a ringing little laugh,

it would have been quite impossible to say if she was the most sensitive and intellectual, or the most gay and frivolous of her bright and charming sex ; and when the ladies returned to their rooms, and the men to smoke or play billiards, Wilfred was as much puzzled to make her out as ever. But he could not help mourning over the quiet evenings departed, and shared very little in Charley Addington's joy at having enough men to make up a rubber, or to play *écarté* even now and then, as two or three of his guests were by no means averse to a cautious gamble on an occasion. On this occasion, however, the billiard-room was the scene of the close of the evening, and Wilfred was in the frame of mind when he could not help contrasting with regret, the rather stiff and pompous conversation of Sir Henry, and the ready but rather broad jokes of Charley Addington, with the cold but polished and clever talk of Sir Percy. But the Monkey very soon let them know that no one was going to monopolise the conversation, and that they would be quite aware of his presence before his visit was over.

CHAPTER III.

ONE morning shortly after Mrs. Henderson's arrival at Glen Dhu, she was sitting talking with Mrs. Addington and Lady Waldermere. These two ladies had often amused themselves with the simplicity and harmless vanity of their less clever companion, and used to delight in drawing her out now and then. Mrs. Henderson's chief weakness was to imagine that every man who was rather more attentive or polite to her than common, was in love with her, and once her slave, nothing he could do ever made her doubt for one moment of his allegiance. If he was particularly attentive to some other fair creature, she felt quite sure that he simply did it out of politeness and good-nature,, but that he was all the time dying to be at her feet again. Sentimental, like so many ladies who are

inclined to grow *substantial*, she certainly was, but romantic very little, and she did not exact any very demonstrative marks of their devotion from her adorers. The two other ladies, who by this time had both seen some little way into the *volage* nature of Wilfred St. John, had been much amused at the fair widow's reception of him, and wondered whether her image really had a prominent place in his heart.

“This morning she began the conversation by observing how very pleasant it was to have two such unusually agreeable men in the house together, as Sir Percy Fitzroy and Mr. St. John, so far away out of the world.

“You forget the attractions I had to offer them to come so far, my dear Alice,” said Mrs. Addington. “But which do you think the cleverest and most amusing?”

“I hardly know that,” she answered; “they are so very different, but I know which I like the best.”

“So do we, my dear,” said Mrs. Addington, smiling, “and he seems to have returned to his allegiance in the most exemplary manner after your separation.”

“I did not know he had any allegiance to

return to," she answered, considerably pleased, and trying to look very unconscious, "but we have been always very good friends, and I hope shall always remain so."

"Only friends! my dear Alice, only friends?" exclaimed Mrs. Addington. "I thought this interesting and romantic wanderer had got much farther than that since his return to his native land, and sometimes I almost fancied he had made a little impression on that hard and cruel heart of yours."

"My dear Bessie, don't talk nonsense," said Mrs. Henderson, who did not in the least see that Mrs. Addington could be joking. "I have always liked him very much, but you know men are sometimes so very attentive without any encouragement, and it is so hard to keep them at a distance without being almost rude to them. You can hardly know what it is, you two who were both married so young, but men will insist on being so very warm, in fact you may call it making love, whether one likes them or not, and I am so good-natured I don't like to hurt their feelings, and often don't know how to send them away. But I don't want to marry any of them, so what can I do?"

HILDA.

"But I should have thought it was such fun," said Mrs. Addington; "now we two unfortunate women have husbands, so no one makes love to us. I have often wished I had been born a widow with a good fortune, one could have had such a heap of admirers. I wonder *you don't enjoy it*. But if you *don't value your freedom*, why don't you marry the most charming of them?"

"Well, I hardly know," she answered; "sometimes I think I will, and then again I change my mind, but I have never been able to make it up which of them to choose. Now there is Frank Digby, who is so devoted, and I am sure he would make the best of husbands, and Mr. St. John is sometimes quite charming; I never know which I like the best, and I am sure that some day in a moment of weakness I shall say 'yes' to one of them."

"Do they ask so very nicely?" said Mrs. Addington in a simple voice, and glancing at Lady Waldermere.

"I am not so base as to repeat what they say," she replied, "nor so vain either, but you two, who know them so well, can fancy if they can make themselves charming or not."

"Ask Hilda if Wilfred St. John can make

himself agreeable," said Mrs. Addington. "I fancy he has made an effort to do it to her during the last fortnight."

"And ask Bessie if he succeeded in doing it at all at Folkestone," said Lady Waldermere; "but you and I, Bessie, have no chance now that the real object has arrived in the north."

"Oh! but it's only his manner," said Mrs. Henderson, "he's not a bit of a flirt in reality. I know him so well, and with all his agreeable and impressive manner he means nothing. I am sure he is at heart the most serious man possible."

"As serious as Frank Digby?" said Mrs. Addington, "*his* past life has been serious enough to more than one fair lady whom we have heard of; rather too serious I should say. I am not sure that perhaps after all the flirt may not be a safer man than the serious one to pass the fleeting hour with; only a pleasant recollection left behind when all is said and done. I don't care about your serious men."

"You know, Bessie, what I mean by serious," she answered, "and you are very unfair on Mr. Digby; the world is always fond

of repeating any bad story of a man. But what do you think about it, Hilda? You are sitting there listening so silently."

"I am listening, my dear, for instruction," she answered; "sacrificed as I was in my infancy on the altar of wedlock, how can I know anything about men's ways?"

"I don't know that I am so sure of that," said Mrs. Henderson, "but if you have no experience, you have watched and heard enough, and have known so many men well that you can fancy what they would say."

"No," she answered, "that's just what I cannot do; I cannot invent their sentiments, and their impassioned language, it's exactly what I am curious to know; now won't you give us a scene from Frank Digby's way of talking? What did he say to you in the punt at Maidenhead, for instance? What did he talk about?"

"What did he talk about?" said the unsuspecting Mrs. Henderson, "well, he told me a good deal about himself and his past life. He certainly told me some rather strange adventures, but he has been unfortunate in his life, and I feel that he has been always more sinned against than sinning. It has been far

more some one else's fault 'than his, all the scandal that he has been mixed up in."

"Oh, poor man!" said Mrs. Addington with a melancholy expression, "what will not a wicked and designing woman do when she gets hold of a poor lamb like Mr. Digby, so charming and so susceptible! But I am sure, my dear, that he told you of his sincere repentance of all his past misdeeds? and his readiness to lead a very different sort of life if he only found the right companion to help him to keep straight?"

"Yes, he certainly did," she answered, "and I believe he would make the best of husbands; he is so thoroughly kind-hearted *au fond*."

"Did he say he would never flirt again, seriously, or in fun; if he could only secure the object?" said Mrs. Addington.

"He said that he could not understand how men with quiet happy homes could go about making love to women, and that he often envied men the happiness of their domestic life," she answered.

"I suppose, then," said Mrs. Addington, laughing, "that it was this feeling of envy which has made him disturb that same domestic

bliss, on one or two occasions which we have vaguely heard tell of. But really, Alice, you would be doing a kindness to society, as well as to the poor sufferer, if you would domesticate this interesting but dangerous animal. And then, if he was ever at all naughty, you could punish him by making him so madly jealous, collecting round you again some of the pleasantest of your old admirers. What fun you might still have!"

"If I were married," said Mrs. Henderson, "I would never flirt, and I cannot believe that the sort of men I should like for my friends, would ever wish to flirt with a married woman, unless she encouraged him very much, which I should certainly never do. I don't see why one could not have plenty of friends without ever thinking of flirting."

"Well, of course I don't know what you would do if you were to marry again, Alice," said Mrs. Addington, "but, if I were you, I don't think I should, however nicely they asked me. You have always the amusement of thinking that you might do it at any moment, and all the sweets of independence at the same time, which are many and great. So if your feelings are so high as to prevent

you ever flirting when married, I should resist the charmer, charm he never so wisely. But you, Hilda, have held your tongue all this time, cannot you throw a little light on the subject? Though, as Alice says, being married women we cannot flirt, and men do not venture to make love, still, in all your wanderings some adventurous admirer must have poured some pretty speeches into those little ears of yours."

"If one was to remember all the nonsense that is poured into ones ears," she answered, "one would have enough to do; and I always pull them up when men begin to talk too much nonsense. But I can make one remark about the talk of men to women, whether they are married or single, which is, that it is very hard for a woman to know if a man is in earnest, or not, if his feelings are really engaged in what he is saying, or if he is only talking to amuse himself, and see the effect on her. The better he expresses himself, the more nicely and glibly he speaks, and the more persuasive he is in voice and action, the more I should be inclined to distrust him. The old hands know the game so well, and they are very fond of trying it when they have got an

inexperienced virgin or matron at hand, just to see that they have not lost the power, and to keep their hands in. The ones who feel most, have most difficulty in expressing it; I won't say in showing it, for, poor things they generally show it only too plainly, and are only ridiculous when they are most anxious to show off at their best. But there are others with more command, whose feelings it is very hard to judge of."

"Oh! do you think so?" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson. "Do you think that it is so hard to tell what a man means? I always think that I can tell exactly."

"Well, my dear, I only spoke for myself," said Lady Waldermere, "but you have had the advantage of much more experience than I have, all this time of blessed independence; besides all the years that you were married, when I knew you did like a little attention and admiration—you would not have been a woman if you had not—and when you did flirt a little, if you would only be honest enough to confess it, even in the lifetime of the late lamented."

"My dear Hilda," she said, "how can you be so irreverent! I did not flirt; I had

several most delightful friends, and of course it is pleasant to any woman, as you yourself say, to feel that she is liked and admired, but that is not flirting."

"Well, I won't fight over the word," said Lady Waldermere; "there are, of course, very nice distinctions to be drawn, and a married woman never does flirt, only a silly girl; but what I want is to know the result of your observations and experience, and how you tell when a man is in earnest, or only talking nonsense."

"I can only answer," said she, "that it is more easily felt than described; I am sure I always have a sensation when a man is really in earnest in what he says, which there is no mistaking; I can see it in his every look and action. It is an earnestness which thrills through me when he is talking, and which makes me feel his love and admiration. There is an eagerness, an anxiety which assures me that he is devoted to me. The mere trifler can never give this impressiveness to his language; his words and his looks can never give that electric feeling of sympathy which unconsciously seems to come over me, and makes every fibre of my body thrill with his im-

passioned accents, as he tells of the love which I can only be sorry to have caused, but cannot return. Oh ! believe me, there can be no mistaking it ! It is only the earnestness of true feeling that can so inspire a man ! ”

“ My dear Alice,” said Lady Waldermere, who with Mrs. Addington had been listening with suppressed amusement at this burst of eloquence. “ Is that magnificent language part of a scene with Francis Digby in a punt ; or is it a passage out of a fashionable novel that you are shortly going to publish ? It is truly grand I assure you, and no doubt your friends are quite convincing to you. But, forgive me for saying so, you are only describing the sensations of yourself on these occasions, and if other women are not equally sensitive and sympathetic, you have not told us by what signs they may distinguish the wolf from the lamb. Now I, in my humble and more prosaic mind, am very much inclined to distrust the man who can go off into a rhapsody like that. I feel that the gentleman doth protest too much. When I see a man making love to order on the stage, which I have seen fairly done in my life—more in Paris I must say than in London—I cannot

help thinking all the time of the man who sat down and composed those impassioned words of love, and trimmed and polished them up, and then of the acting lover who learnt them by heart and rehearsed them all. So in real life, if the thing is too well done I doubt its spontaneousness, and I suspect the art at once. No, in my humble experience, eloquence and fire are not the true signs of the great passion; the absence of words, the effort to speak, and the failure to produce a rational sentence, these are far better signs, and instead of the impassioned lover on his knees, that goose look which I know so well. Oh! my dear Alice, there is no mistaking the goose look! Poor things! when men are very far gone, in my experience they are very pitiful things, grandeur is the last thing which comes to their expressive countenances. But, then, you know, I am speaking all this time of what I don't pretend to know much about."

"You may not pretend, Hilda," said Mrs. Addington, while Mrs. Henderson sat by with a face expressive more of discomfort than of conviction; "but you have some of the theory of it all pretty handy, won't you give us a little more of your experience, or of your

ideas, at any rate? You do like a little unobtrusive attention now and then, I think?"

"Yes, my dear Bessie, of course I like it, and so do you, well enough," she answered, "and I shall go on liking it as long as I am decent looking, and can make myself at all pleasant, and I dare say a good deal longer. It is so amusing; one has both the old practitioners, who think themselves irresistible, and the fresh young hands who fall such easy victims, but who still often afford sport, and all go to fill up the bag, and make up the number of the slain. But it is the older hands who afford real sport. I often think that the sensation of playing them must be much what you fishermen, Bessie, describe as the glorious excitement of playing an extra strong fish with very delicate tackle, only the intellectual sensation is far more fascinating than the physical. First they rise to the bait, the attracting of them is very simple, the less you do the more they come; the throwing of the fly is not the difficulty, it is the hooking and playing them. They think that it is the fisherman who is to be the victim, poor silly things! and that it is the fair thrower of the bait who is to be pulled into the water, and

not they out of it. They make pretty speeches, look softly into her eyes, and try all the little dodges they know so well ; and when they are beginning to get confident, and see victory before them, then it is that my turn for amusement comes. I give a little pull away, and give them to understand that it is not to be all their own way, then they come again to see what sort of woman this is, and curiosity raises their interest, then I give them a good jerk. They don't always like it, but they are sure to come again till fairly hooked, and then the struggles begin. The agony between wounded pride, and a pain about the stony region of the heart, mixed with a feeling of the impossibility of failure. Then real doubts and anxieties, and a determination to give it all up, and disgorge the bait, sweet though it tastes. At this moment a little jealousy infused is not a bad thing to keep them struggling, and then they often go away, and try the effect of pretending to desert the object. But if no feeling whatever is shown about their absence, they are certain to come back again, pride always brings them back, and at last they are fairly landed, and you may kill them at once by telling them plainly that they have been only

treated to a little of their own favourite amusement, or you can put them into your pond and feed them there with little crumbs of comfort now and then, while they will roll about contentedly enough, and always come when you whistle for them. Oh ! it's really a grand amusement that. But the poor things who slay themselves, who come up inarticulate with emotion at once, and who have the decided goose-look before you have been fairly civil to them, are very ignoble sport."

"My dear Hilda," said Mrs. Henderson, trying to look shocked, though evidently very much interested in all Lady Waldermere had been saying, "I had no idea you were so wicked ; I never dreamed of hearing you talk of flirting as a science, and one of the fine arts. But it is dangerous work all the same."

"Dangerous !" she answered. "Dangerous to whom ? Not to me, I can assure you."

"Do you mean to say that you never cared a bit for any of your victims ?" she said.

"Never a bit for any one of them, and I'm not afraid of ever doing so," she replied. "If I could care, the fun would be over ; it is my perfect indifference that makes my head so cool over it. I never have cared one bit when they

went away, if they ever came back again or not."

"I very much agree with you about the fun of it, Hilda," said Mrs. Addington, "but I always did like flirting, and I am afraid I never made much secret of it, so Charley always says, and wishes sometimes that I would affect a virtue if I don't happen to have it. But you, Hilda, have always carried on your little amusements so quietly that no one has ever called you a flirt; and it was a long time before I did anything but vaguely suspect you, but I never new before to what a perfection you had brought your system. I am afraid, however, that I could never carry it out like you; I am not cold-blooded enough. I could never observe the rules, and my own feelings and inclinations, my likings or not likings, would come in and spoil the whole thing."

"Ah! but that's just where you make the mistake," said Lady Waldermere; "if you wish to defy mankind, and to amuse yourself with them, you must be cold blooded. If you let any other feeling influence you, except the amusement and the excitement of the game, then good-bye to your power! I am sorry to

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say that my belief in the nature of men is, that in nineteen cases out of twenty, as soon as they are convinced that they have made a woman really fond of them, they begin to despise her ;

they often take some little time to get tired of her, but contempt is sure to bring that at last ; they may stay to be certain of their victory, and to enjoy it a little, but it is most difficult for the greater number of men to love a woman who is devoted to them. It is a sad anomaly in nature, but I fear it is a fact. Il y a toujours l'un qui baise, et l'autre qui tende la joue ! If a woman wants to keep her hold on a man, whether husband, friend, or lover, let her make him feel a little misgiving now and then ; let her make him remember that he is not the only man in the world, and remember that the same charm that has fascinated him can also fascinate another. I do not say that there are no exceptions, no instances of real mutual love and confidence, but they are very rare, and what I have said, is, I fear, the rule in nature."

"But in real earnest, Hilda, do you mean what you are saying ?" said Mrs. Henderson. "Are those horribly cynical opinions truly yours ? You speak as though you did not

believe in anything true, or earnest, or good; surely you don't think all life a farce?"

"I am very sorry to shock you, my dear Alice," she answered, "but I regret to say that I think there is more of the farce in it than of anything else. As I said, I will allow honesty and sincerity to a few, but I fear it is too often only to those who have not the wits to have anything else. Stupidity and want of imagination may be at times blessings in life. But I was referring more to those who have all their lights burning, and who can see only too clearly the two sides to every picture. So far I have been talking more of men than of women; for us, I will say that I believe nearly every woman would infinitely prefer to be devoted to only one man, and to find in him a friend and a companion, and a support always there to lean upon, but it is this stupid contempt of men for women—often their superiors in everything—which drives women to despise them; and in the excitements of society, in whatever dissipation is within her grasp, in short by any means in her power to divert her mind from what it is feeling; and find something for it to feed on, however frivolous. A man may be, and often is, very fond of a

woman much his inferior, but it is seldom that a woman cares for a man who is her inferior; not I think on account of her superiority, but because, while a woman has enough modesty to perceive, and even to appreciate, the superiority of the man, the man will never allow the superiority of the woman; he does not value it and seek to raise himself by it, but he is angry if he sees a sign of it, refuses to see any sense in her judgment or opinion, and ends by making her despise his stupidity and littleness. She may condescend to manage him, for we cannot change our relations in life at will, but she must feel a contempt for him, and where there is contempt there can be no real love. I am sure it is such a feeling as this which makes so many men so averse to letting women have a decent education."

"You have gone so deep into it all," said Mrs. Henderson, "that I don't know how to follow you or answer you, but I cannot help thinking that there are a great many people in the world, both men and women, who have not wits enough, as you say, to be moved by the abstruse motives you have been telling us of, and who like each other well enough, and jog along."

“Yes, my dear, I know they do,” replied Lady Waldermere, “but the fools are not worth studying, and I was only making a study of some with rather more brains, and who were influenced by what they could think, as well as by what they could feel. You called me cynical, and asked me what I truly thought, so I went into all this long discussion which has taken away your breath, and my own too a little.”

“For my part,” said Mrs. Addington, “I never studied it all so deeply, and could not have given you any other reason why women flirted, except that it was their nature to. Which fact and reason I was quite contented with and have acted accordingly. I have had lots of fun, and, as Hilda says, mean to go on at the amusement, and have lots more, so you need not pull that long face, Alice, and you may go and tell Charley if you like, he knows it well enough; sometimes he laughs and chaffs, and sometimes he growls and uses strong language, but it makes no difference to me, and if he does get a little jealous it only makes it more fun. But I must be off now and attend to household duties; so I leave you and Hilda to settle any of the more scientific

points that you don't quite make out; only think of poor Frank Digby, that is my last injunction."

And with this parting shot Mrs. Addington left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE newly arrived guests had been about a week at Glen Dhu, when Mrs. Addington was talking one evening in the conservatory to the Monkey, as every one in the house now called Master Evelyn. He had been going on much in his usual rampageous way, and had certainly kept the house alive, but he had not as yet distinguished himself by doing anything out of the way startling.

“So you have got the Welch prince coming to-morrow, I hear, Mrs. Glen Dhu?” he said. He insisted on calling Charley Addington Glen Dhu, or very often the black chief, and his wife he said must be Mrs. Glen Dhu, as there was no proper title for the laird’s wife.

“Yes, Mr. Llewellyn is coming to-morrow,” she answered; “is he a particular friend of yours?”

"Oh! very much," he answered, "he is the best fun to chaff that I know. You know he fancies himself a descendant of a long line of princes, and his grandfather made a heap of money, and I believe took the name, not being content with the humble one that had descended to him through countless generations of Ap's. They say that if he took his real name, the mysterious question as to who our unknown Welshman is, whose name is painted up upon every dead wall round the metropolis, would be at last answered. You've no idea what fun the prince is. One of our fellows swears he met him travelling in Italy as a prince, and with a coronet on his dressing-case and everything else he had."

"Now look here, Monkey," said Mrs. Addington, "I want you to be a good boy for once in your life, and to leave him alone, and not make him look ridiculous. I know I must give you my reason, and trust to you to keep it to yourself, or you will be sure to break out at the wrong moment. You see Mr. Llewellyn is not at all a bad sort of fellow in reality. You may laugh at him and think him ridiculous, but there are many much worse men in the world, and we all

have our little weaknesses, only some of us can conceal them a little better than others. Mr. Llewellyn is very rich at any rate, that you cannot deny, and I don't think he would make at all a bad husband."

"But you've got one already, my lady," said the Monkey, "and even if you were thinking of putting Charley out of the way, the prince is no richer, and not half such a good fellow in any way."

"No, you stupid boy," she answered, "you know I get on with Charley like two doves, but can one never be thinking of a husband for any one but oneself?"

"Oh! the gay widow, you mean! I don't think she'd have him at any price, she always has a lot of much gayer knights round her, and she would find him very slow after Fitzroy, or Digby, or St. John, so I don't think she need prevent my keeping my hand in by a little fun with the prince."

"Well, if you will be so stupid," she answered, "I am thinking of Miss Featherstone; she is very pretty and nice, and one of a large family not very rich. Mr. Llewellyn met her once at my house in London, and seemed to like her, and if in the fortnight

he will pass here; he will only get to like her a good deal more, I think it would answer very well indeed. There, you see, I have taken you into my confidence, and I want you to show yourself not unworthy of it."

"This is very sad," he answered. "I am afraid after so much confidential condescension from the lairdess, that I must do my best to help turn your Cinderella into a princess. But it will be splendid fun to see the prince spooning, and when once the fair Lily has hooked her fish, I can help her to gaff him, and enjoy his struggles. I'm not sure that there may not be as much sport got out of it, as by beginning at once."

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Addington; "I think I can trust you to be a good boy."

The following day the great Mr. Llewellyn arrived, and though dinner had been put off for him, they were well in the middle of it before he arrived, and took the place that had been left vacant for him between Mrs. Addington and Miss Featherstone.

He was a man of about six- or seven-and-twenty, rather tall and slight, with light hair which had an inclination to be sandy, blue eyes, which perhaps might have had a

little more expression in them, and a pale complexion, but he was pleasant looking, and very gentleman-like. It was his manner that made him seem at times a little absurd, for he was rather pompous, and seemed to think a good deal of himself, the result of having been very much spoilt since he was a child, and of always having had his own way, and everything he could wish for.

At dinner he talked mostly to Mrs. Addington, but he was polite and condescending to his other pretty neighbour, and seemed pleased to meet her again.

The evening passed away much as usual, the party being scattered between the drawing-room and the conservatory, and in due time the ladies retired to bed, and the men to smoke and play whist in the library.

Sir Henry Waldermere, Addington, Colonel Macdonald, and Wilfred were playing, and Sir Percy Fitzroy and the Monkey were cutting in. Llewellyn was looking on, declining to play that evening as he said he was sleepy after his long journey, and should retire very soon. The Monkey had been as good as his promise, and had not chaffed him once about anything, rather to Llewellyn's surprise, as he was used to his never losing a chance.

At last he said he should go to bed, and walked out of the room, and the Monkey, who wanted to get another cigar, followed him to go to his room to fetch one. They said a few words as they went up the stairs together, when Llewellyn remarked,

“What a puzzling house this is to find one’s way about, it seems to be all passages and turns, and all the doors look exactly alike. I came so late, and was shown up in such a hurry that I’ll be shot if I know how to find my own room again. You must know your way about it pretty well by this time, Evelyn, can’t you help me to which it must be?”

To the mind of a professional practical joker here was a temptation not to be resisted; they were at that moment just coming to the chamber sacred to the fair Miss Featherstone, the mischievous eye of the Monkey saw that the key was by some chance on the outside of the door, and all his promises of good behaviour went to the winds. The door was sure not to be fastened, as the key was outside so after pretending to look about him and think, he said,

“This must be your room I am sure, so I’ll wish you a good night and pleasant dreams.”

"Many thanks," said the unsuspecting Llewellyn, "and good-night," and so saying, he went into the room in a sleepy sort of way, without looking particularly where he was going, as he shut the door behind him. The moment it was closed the Monkey quietly turned the key in the lock, and noiselessly withdrawing it, put it into his pocket, and then retired to his room stifling with inward laughter, and thinking to himself, "They are not likely to forget each other for some time to come after this evening, I wonder what on earth he will do, I would give worlds to be behind a curtain and see what he does."

He went on to his own room to fetch a cigar, wondering if the prince would climb out of the window, or rouse the whole house up, or creep up the chimney, but as he had his rat in the trap, he could not resist keeping him there for a little, so he went downstairs again by the other staircase to avoid passing the door of his prison, and returned to the library.

He had selected an enormous cigar, and having filled himself a very stiff glass of whiskey and seltzer, he lit his cigar and established himself in a very comfortable arm-chair

to watch the game. A new rubber had been begun in his absence, so he looked on, getting more and more sleepy as his glass grew emptier and his cigar shorter. Every now and then he wondered what on earth had happened in the room upstairs, but he was much too old a hand at practical jokes for the results ever to cause him a moment's uneasiness, and as the game grew more interesting he forgot them entirely. At last hearts and diamonds became very indistinct to him, his cigar went out, and the stump lodged between the top of his waistcoat and his shirt, and in the depths of his arm-chair he slept the sleep which seems to be common to the unjust and the just alike.

The whist continued to a tolerably advanced hour, and when the party broke up one of them said, "What shall we do to the sleeping beauty in the chair?"

"Oh! leave him where he is," said Charley Addington. "I never wake any one up, and the housemaids are quite used to find the corpses of tired stalkers, or gamblers, in an arm-chair, or on the sofa. I only wish we had another Monkey to set at him and play off on him one of the many tricks he has played on some one else in his mischievous life."

So the party departed to their own rooms, leaving him to his devices, and he slumbered peacefully on with the fatal key in his pocket.

When the unfortunate Llewellyn found himself in his own bedroom, as he thought, and already half asleep, he walked up to the dressing-table, and put his candle down upon it, before he looked round the room.

The first thing which attracted his attention was a pair of lady's gloves on the table, and instead of his own elaborate brushes, etc., which his servant always laid out with such care, he saw all the miscellaneous articles which assist at the toilet of a fair young creature of the gentler sex.

"Bless me!" he thought, "that young brute of a Monkey has shown me into the wrong room, but I'll pay him out for it to-morrow." And at the same moment he glanced towards the bed where at that instant there was a slight commotion among the bed-clothes, and a smothered cry from underneath them.

Hastily he caught up his candle, and with a hurried exclamation of apology he made a rush towards the door. He turned the handle, but it would not move. Then he gave it another and more desperate pull, but it was as firm as a rock.

"Oh! do go'out! What are you doing! How very unkind!" came out in smothered accents from under the bed-clothes.

"I can't get out!" he said in a voice of despair, and down he set his candle on a chair, and pulled furiously at the handle with both hands. But not a bit did it give. The canny Scotch carpenter who had put the door there, had no idea of making one that the first Saxon who came could pull down with a touch.

The moment was fearful; he was a prisoner, what was he to do!

"If you don't go, I'll scream," said the smothered voice getting desperate.

"For heaven's sake don't," he said in despair, "it isn't my fault. I came here by mistake, and I can't get out."

"Oh! you could if you liked," said the voice again. "Oh, this is unkind!"

"But I can't open the door," said he, making it rattle with his struggles. "They have fastened it outside."

"Oh! tell them to let you out," cried the voice again. "I know they will if you ask them!"

"But there's no one there!" he exclaimed in accents of desperation.

"Oh! what shall I do? This is too cruel!" came again in tearful accents from the bed.

"That young brute must have locked me in," he cried. "I am sure the lock is not broken. What on earth is to be done!"

"Oh! you must go out," said the voice again. "I know you could if you would!"

"But indeed I can't," he said; "only for heaven's sake be quiet. I have no doubt I shall manage it somehow if you will only wait a minute."

Down he knelt at the door, examined the lock which looked sound and strong, and then looked through the keyhole, when the chilly blast into his eye assured him that the key had been removed, and made him feel sure that it was now in the Monkey's pocket. It was for this he thought that he had lain by so quietly all the evening.

"Curse the door!" he muttered. "I don't know how to get it open, it opens inwards, and the lock is too strong for me ever to break. I can never get out by it."

"What are you doing!" said the voice again in a stronger tone. "If you don't go I'll ring the bell. I'll call Mr. Addington! Oh! this is too bad. Why won't you go!"

"I'd go if I could," he answered in a louder voice growing more desperate; "if you'll only be patient a minute I'll manage it. I came in here by mistake. I only came this evening and I had forgotten my room, and that cursed young brute Evelyn told me this was my room, and when he got me inside he locked the door for one of his disgusting jokes."

By this time the fair creature in the bed seemed to realise a little what had happened, and began to think what was to be done. If she screamed, the people might come, but what a scene it would be; it would be such a joke as she would never be able to stand, and that she would never hear the last of. If she waited quietly a few minutes, he was sure to get out, as Evelyn would unlock the door again. So she resolved to be quiet for a few minutes, and not to scream, at any rate. What a comfort it was, she thought, that men were in the habit of going to bed sober in these modern days, and not as they did in a house like this a hundred years back.

Meanwhile Llewellyn, who was collecting his wits, wondered what he should do; and then, who was in the bed? for he could not recognise the smothered voice, and had not yet inspected

the room enough to say, but a moment's calmer reflection convinced him that it could be none other than the fair Lily Featherstone.

He was standing in a disconsolate way by the door, when she said again from under the bed-clothes, "Perhaps you can get out of the window?"

To the window he went at once, and quietly opened it, but he saw nothing underneath but the broad expanse of the glass roof of the conservatory, so that his last hope of a ladder of sheets, or a break-neck jump, was dashed away.

"It's quite impossible" he said, in a mournful voice; "there's nothing but the top of the conservatory; and though I'd risk my neck to save annoying you, I cannot get through that!"

There was a silence of a few minutes, and then he said, "I am really afraid that there is no way of getting out till the door is unlocked. I could ring the bell if you like, but I am afraid that we should only awake a footman first, and if he came we could hardly send him for the key to Evelyn; all the house would know it and make a joke of it, and I should like to get out quietly if I could."

Then he added after a short pause. "I am

not sure who you are, but I am afraid that you will hate me, and think me a brute for ever after this, but I really don't know what to do."

During all this, Miss Featherstone was gradually recovering her presence of mind, and was reflecting what line she should take. Should she show her face or not? That was the next consideration, for so far she had kept it concealed below the sacred barrier of the sheets, but there were many difficulties in taking counsel with an unseen counsellor, so she turned over in her mind how she probably looked at that moment. Happily, she thought, young women have given up wearing night caps; and she reflected what she had done with her hair before she turned into bed, and then she remembered that she had done it up in tight coils, rather extra tight that evening, and had thought how nice she was looking in them; then she put her hand up to her head to see if they had suffered much, and was satisfied to find that they were still tight and smooth. Then her eyes and complexion,—and she remembered that when turned out at night by any of the incidents caused by a lot of brothers and sisters, her eyes had

always looked so large and dewy, and darker than by day ; and thanks to a good constitution and early hours so far, her complexion was always fresh and pink ; so she concluded by thinking that in that dim light she would look anything but ugly, therefore twisting the sheet tight round her neck, she slowly and cautiously put her head up.

At the sight which met her eyes, she could hardly help laughing, poor Llewellyn standing there looking so forlorn with the candle in one hand, and the handle of the door in the other, and an expression of blank despair on his face, he looked so humble and crest-fallen that she felt she must help him out of his difficulty.

“ But what are you going to do, Mr. Llewellyn ? ” she said in a timid voice,

“ That’s exactly what I don’t know,” he answered ; “ that young beast Evelyn has not let me out yet, and perhaps he intends keeping me here for hours ! What am I to do ! and I’m so tired,” he added in a melancholy voice. And then with some irritation, “ I’ll kill the young brute to-morrow ! ”

While he was speaking, he gradually and in a diffident way turned his eyes to the fair

occupant of the bed, and saw Miss Featherstone looking prettier to his fancy than he had ever seen her looking before, either in the evening just past, or when he met her before at Mrs. Addington's in London.

At last he said, "I'm afraid you must decide what is to be done, Miss Featherstone. It seems that Evelyn intends keeping me here for hours, so you must make up your mind if I am to knock the house up, or settle down here for perhaps the night, as I really cannot stand here by the door for five or six hours."

"But how can you get out then," she asked, "without the whole household knowing what has happened?"

"Well, I've been thinking of that," he said, "and in the first place that young villain must surely let me out before then; and if he does not, we can call the first housemaid we hear in the morning, and she can send your maid here, and you can send to Addington, and tell him that you think Evelyn has locked your door for fun and taken the key away with him."

"But do you mean to say that you contemplate staying here all night?" she asked in an anxious tone.

“I don’t see what else to do,” he answered, “but I will stay awake if you like,” he added in a mournful voice,—“I don’t think that I snore, and the hardness of the floor would keep me from sleeping very sound, though I am very tired. But I’ll look out of the window all night if you really wish it,” he said, going to the window in a disconsolate sort of manner, and leaning on the sill, while he gazed pensively at the stars. He could just see the dark sea, and the dusky outline of the mountains round the loch in the dim star-light, and then he wished most devoutly that he had never come to Scotland. Then he mentally cursed the Monkey again very bitterly, and then began to think how very chilly it was. At last he said, “May I shut the window, I am so cold?”

“Oh! I don’t want you to stay at the window all night; you will catch cold. But this is dreadful; I wish I had screamed at first, you would have got out. I can’t scream now in cold blood when I am no longer frightened.”

Then she looked at him by the window, and he looked so very mournful that she could not help laughing, and said, “Oh! but you

may shut the window of course, poor thing ! I am really sorry for you ; I was frightened at first, and then angry, but now I am sure it is not your fault, and I am afraid that you will pass a most wretched night. But I suppose we must make the best of it, and wait till Mr. Evelyn chooses to unlock the door. I wish there was a sofa in the room, but I will give you a plaid, and a shawl and a cloak, and there is the hearthrug of skins which looks rather soft and warm, and I can spare you a pillow, so you will see that as I try to make you comfortable I have forgiven you quite."

With much shyness and diffidence he collected the various articles, and proceeded to make himself a bed on the deerskins that formed the hearthrug.

"This is really too kind and good of you," he said as he was preparing to lie down ; "I'll call you as soon as I hear any one moving in the morning. I do hope I shall manage to get out without their all finding it out. Good night, Miss Featherstone."

"Good night," she said. "I do hope you will be able to sleep, and not be very uncomfortable."

Llewellyn then proceeded to go to bed

as well as he could, growling to himself a last benediction to Evelyn, with "Curse that Monkey! How I will pay him out for this to-morrow!"

Then he rolled up in the plaid and shawl, pulled the cloak over him, and laid his head on the pillow that had been so lately impressed by the fair head of his charming neighbour. It was still warm, and there was a faint perfume about it which made him think pleasantly of the pretty owner of the head who was still so near him.

As he got warm and comfortable his anger against the Monkey subsided a little, and much as his dignity had been ruffled he began to see the ludicrous side of the affair. It was unpardonable in him to have played such a joke, but he hoped now that it would all end without a fuss. Then he went on to think how well Miss Featherstone had behaved, how nicely modest, and how properly shocked she had been at first, and then how very good-natured. What a nice sweet girl she really was, and how comfortable her pillow felt! and as the faint sweet perfume that hung about it filled his brain, he thought she must be refined in her tastes, for she evidently did not put any

nasty things on her pretty hair ; how pretty it looked in its thick soft coils, and how large and soft her eyes were ; he had no idea before that they were so large, and he would never have believed that a lady could look so nice under the circumstances. Then he went on thinking about her, and how nice it must be to have a wife like that,—by Jove ! he would marry,—he had often thought of it, but never like this before,—yes, he was determined he would marry as soon as he could find a nice girl,—one like the nice girl who was still so close to him,—and so his thoughts went wandering on till he gradually forgot where he was, the room, the door, the Monkey, and Miss Featherstone, and he was fast asleep.

Evelyn slept in his own chair in blissful unconsciousness that all the rest of them had gone to bed, and he did not wake up till it was getting light, when he felt very sleepy and chilly, and dragged himself out of his arm-chair and up to bed, trying to awake himself as little as possible, so as to fall asleep again as soon as he was between the sheets. He was far too well-used to playing practical jokes for his atrocity of that evening to make any impression on his sleepy head, and he struggled quickly out of

his clothes, sending them flying all about the room, rolled into bed, and was fast asleep again, without ever giving one thought to his prisoners.

Llewellyn slept peacefully on his hearth-rug, and never awoke till it was broad daylight, when he looked at his watch and found that it was half-past five. The housemaids could not be very long, he thought, but he would lie still and not disturb Miss Featherstone till there was some one about.

At last he heard a footstep down the passage, and then all was still again ; he waited some time, but then he remembered that the housemaids had not much to do upstairs at that early hour, and at last he thought he might awake her, so he sat up and coughed in a gruff sort of way.

The fair damsel woke with a start, and could not think for the first minute what it was that she heard, till she remembered the strange events of the night, and her friend on the hearthrug.

"What is it?" she asked in rather a timid voice, for it seemed somehow worse to her to have him there by broad daylight than by candlelight.

"They are moving about the house," he said, "but I did not like to call, as they would have known it was not your voice."

"But, good heavens! how am I to get up to come to the door?" she cried.

"I will put my head out of the window," he said, "and you can do what you like in the room, but I had better ring first, and I think you had better tell whoever comes to go and tell Addington that you want particularly to see him at once, and when he comes, you can say you believe that Evelyn has locked your door for a joke, and taken the key away, and you need not say anything about my being in here, and I will threaten to murder that Monkey if he speaks, so perhaps no one may ever know about it at all."

"Very well," she said, "you go to the window, but don't ring yet, or they will come before I am ready."

Once more he went to the window, but in a more cheerful frame of mind than the night before; and having opened it wide, he leant on the window-sill in the beautiful bright morning sun, and watched the clouds curling round the tops of the mountains, and the sea sparkling in the light.

Presently he heard the bell ring, and then Miss Featherstone's voice saying, "I won't keep you in the chilly morning air any longer," so he pulled himself into the room again and looked round at her, and was astonished to see how pretty and neat she had made herself in so short a time. Her eyes looked large and dewy, and her soft hair was rolled tightly up,—what a lot of hair she's got, he thought,—and she was dressed in a pretty white and pink *peignoir* of quilted silk, a present from Mrs. Addington.

"How did you sleep?" she asked, laughing.
"I was sound asleep when you awoke me."

"I am ashamed to say that I slept much better than I ought to have, after distressing you so," he answered, "but I am afraid you will never really forgive me, or like to speak to me again."

"Oh! no," she said, "I have quite forgiven your unwilling share in the joke, but what shall we do to that miserable Monkey."

"Oh! I'll kill him! the wretched creature," he answered, "though somehow, I am afraid I don't feel quite as angry with him as I ought."

"What a time they are answering the

bell ! will you ring it again, please ? ” she said.

“ Are you in such a hurry ? ” he asked, for he was beginning to feel that it was very pleasant talking to this pretty girl in the *peignoir*, and the incongruity and slight air of impropriety about it, all rather added to the charm.

“ Yes, I want to get to bed again,” she said ; “ I have not had half a night’s rest during the night, you see, I have been disturbed twice in it.”

“ What will Charley Addington say ? ” he remarked ; “ I wonder if he will be angry or amused ? but I know he’ll pitch into the Monkey pretty well.”

At this moment they heard a step in the passage, and a knock at the door.

“ Who’s there ? ” asked Miss Featherstone.

“ It’s me, ma’am,” said a timid voice ; “ please, mum, didn’t your bell ring ? ”

“ Yes,” she said. “ Will you go to Mr. Addington and tell him that I am very sorry to trouble him at this hour, but that my door is locked, and I cannot get it open, and say it would be very kind of him if he would come and speak to me here a minute.”

"Yes, mum," said the voice.

And away went the early housemaid, wondering what game Miss Featherstone had been up to to lock her door, and not be able to get it open without Mr. Addington's help. With much diffidence she gave several ineffectual taps at the laird's door,—at last an irritated and rather sleepy voice called out,

"Hallo! who's there! What the deuce do you want at this hour, I'm not going stalking this morning."

"Please, sir," said a timid voice, "it's Miss Featherstone."

"Miss Who?" was the answer. "What does she want at this hour with me?"

"Please, sir, she says that she's very sorry to trouble you at this hour," said the voice, "but her door's locked itself, and she can't get it open. And would you kindly come and speak to her?"

"I've not got her key," he growled as he struggled out of bed, and into some garments, and then set off to Miss Featherstone's room.

"You need not wait," he said in rather a grumpy voice to the housemaid, who was standing in the passage in an undecided sort of

way, I'll call if I want all the house to open the door."

He gave Miss Featherstone's door a bang, and called out, "Here I am, Miss Featherstone, what can I do for you?"

"Oh! is that you, Mr. Addington? it is very good of you to come, are you alone?" she said through the door.

"Alone!" he answered; "of course I am. I don't bring a party about with me at this hour, but I'll go and collect one if you particularly wish it."

"Oh! no; but I want to speak to you alone, and to tell you that I think Mr. Evelyn has locked my door, and taken away the key for a joke, and I want to ask you to get it from him for me. I sent for you early, so that all the house should not know, but I am very sorry."

"All right," he called out, and walked away to the room of the delinquent, wondering what on earth was the point of this new joke of the irrepressible Master Evelyn. He went straight into his room, and woke him up by the simple process of throwing an immense very wet bath sponge that was handy into the upturned youthful and innocent looking face of the Monkey, who woke up with a start, and an exclamation

that was anything but canonical, and stared in astonishment at seeing Charley Addington looking at him with anything but a pleased expression.

“Now, you young Monkey,” he said, “what have you done with the key of Miss Featherstone’s door? Give it me directly.”

“Good Lord!” he exclaimed, starting up and suddenly collecting his wits, “I locked the prince into her room last night, and then fell asleep and forgot all about it! I’ll give it you at once,” he said, scrambling out of bed and fishing about for the garment in the pocket of which he had put the fatal key.

Addington took the key, and walked out of the room without saying another word, and went and unlocked the door of Miss Featherstone’s room.

“Can I do anything more for you, Miss Featherstone?” he asked.

“Oh! no, thank you,” she replied through the door; “but it is very good of you to come, and I am so much obliged to you.”

“Good-bye then,” he said; “and I think you had better keep your key inside in future.”

Back he went to the Monkey’s room, and said to him, “Now look here, young gentle-

man, this is too bad of you. A joke on a man is sometimes too much of a good thing, but on a young lady in my house like this, it is a great deal too much; and you will see it when you think of what you have done. Now the best thing that you can do is to go out early, and go fishing. I am glad to see that there is a bright sun, and you have no chance of catching anything. Go up the river near the house, about two or three miles towards the loch, and stay there till you hear from Mrs. Addington whether Miss Featherstone will see you again or not; if she won't, and if I were her I would not, you must go on board the yacht, and I must send you to Balmacara to-morrow morning. I really thought you knew better than to insult a young lady like this."

"My dear old Charley," he exclaimed, "I never dreamed of carrying the joke so far; you see the prince did not know his room, and he asked me which it was just before we came to Miss Featherstone's door, and I could not resist the temptation to show him in, and you see the unlucky key was in the outside of the door, and I turned it, and put it in my pocket. But I only meant to keep him there a few minutes, and then I went down to the library

and forgot it and fell asleep there. But you can get Mrs. Addington to put it all right, I know, there's a good old boy, and I'll go up to the loch at once." And then as the sense of the absurdity of it all came over him again, he said, "But do tell me how he looked as he came out ! Did he seem to have slept well ?"

"I'm not joking a bit, Master Evelyn, I assure you," said Charley ; "and you ought to be ashamed of yourself if you ever were in your life, and my wife will be very angry with you, and it will serve you right if you have to go back again to-morrow, so just you hold that mischievous tongue of yours, you have done quite harm enough ; you don't seem to understand how disgusting it is for a young lady to be the subject of such a joke. So just you go off now and wait till you hear from Mrs. Addington," and so saying he walked out of the room.

He had not got far down the passage before he met Llewellyn, who almost ran against him in his haste, and looked very sheepish when he saw him.

"Good morning," he said, "you are up early, but we don't generally affect evening dress in the morning here."

“ Well, the fact is,” he answered, hesitating a good deal, “ you see I went to the drawing-room to fetch a book, and I sat down there and began to read and fell asleep, so I have not been to bed yet.”

“ Well, I hope you will finish your night comfortably now,” said Charley ; “ you know which your room is, don’t you ? ”

“ Oh ! yes ; I think so,” he answered, “ but the fact is that your house is very puzzling to a stranger, and all the doors are just alike. I believe my room is just round the corner.”

Addington accompanied him to the door, and then departed to consult with his lively other half as to what was to be done.

Mrs. Addington could not help screaming with laughter when he gave her a description of it all, but she was really vexed at the annoyance Miss Featherstone must have had, and was angry with the Monkey for playing such a trick on her, and for breaking his promise of good behaviour to her.

“ It is too bad of him,” she said, “ when I went so far as to tell him I did not want the prince, as he always calls him, made to look ridiculous to Lily Featherstone.”

“ Well, anyhow, they have made each

other's acquaintance better, than they would have done in a fortnight in any other way," said Charley; "and Master Llewellyn knows what the fair Lily looks like *en déshabille*, and not at all bad either I should think, Bessie; I had a good mind to put my head in at the door after unlocking it, but I thought it was not fair. Perhaps he may take a fancy to her after seeing her under the circumstances, who knows!"

"What business have you got to think what Lily Featherstone looks like under the circumstances?" said Mrs. Addington.

"Well, my dear, they cannot all look as nice as you, you know, but still we may have our opinions. But the question is what is to be done. I have sent the boy out fishing, and told him to stay at the loch till you sent to say if Miss Featherstone had forgiven him or not; and if not, that he must pack up and be off."

"Oh! I have no doubt she will forgive him, but I shall not be in a hurry," she said.

"Find out all you can about what passed, from her," said Charley, laughing. "I have a great curiosity, I must confess, to know how they got on."

"Yes, I will," she answered, "but now,

please, let me go to sleep again. I have not nearly done my night's rest."

When Mrs. Addington was dressed, she determined after a little thought to wait till after breakfast, and then give Miss Featherstone a chance of speaking to her, when she was sure she would tell her all that had happened.

Breakfast had been going on for some little time when Llewellyn made his appearance, and Charley Addington and his wife could see the anxious glance he cast round the table, and his look of relief at seeing that two people were absent. Poor man, his mind had been sadly troubled after he got to his own room as to what he should do. His feelings were divided between wrath against Evelyn, anxiety that there should be no fuss and that the joke should not be known, and admiration for the way in which Miss Featherstone had behaved through it all, and the remembrance of her pretty face kept coming back to him. He had some trouble in hardening his heart before he could face the party at breakfast, and at last he resolved that he would confide in Mrs. Addington, and if Miss Featherstone felt too shy to meet him again, he would drop any feelings of his own, and leave Glen Dhu at once.

“What has become of the Monkey?” asked Wilfred at last, as breakfast went on, and there was no sign of that young person. “Is he still sleeping it out in the arm-chair, where we left him last night?”

“He went out fishing early,” said Charley; “he said he wanted fresh air and exercise, and preferred the banks of the river to the social board.”

“What on earth takes him out to fish on a brilliant hot morning like this? I always thought he was mad, but I believe he’s up to some mischief. I always distrust him when he’s very quiet or out of the way,” answered Wilfred.

Llewellyn looked much relieved to know that he was delivered from the presence of his tormentor for the present at all events, though he looked nervously from time to time at the door, and wondered Miss Featherstone did not appear.

That young lady had been sadly troubled in her mind when she was at last alone, and the key turned in the door on the inside. First she made a solemn vow always to lock her door carefully every night for the rest of her life, and then she wondered how on earth she was to face Llewellyn again? She felt sure that when she came downstairs, she should look so conscious that every one must find out

at once what had happened. Then she determined that she would ask Mrs. Addington to send her back to England again; she could never stay there and face the party if they knew what had happened, and they were sure to know it somehow. She got up and dressed at last, and at first she thought she would plead a headache, and say she could not come down to breakfast, but this she thought would only call attention to her, so she settled that she would go down very late, when every one would be leaving the dining-room. She waited for half an hour, getting more and more nervous, and then hardened her heart to make the plunge into the dining-room.

The door was already open, some of the party had left the room, and as she came in she saw that Evelyn was not there, and Llewellyn was standing by the window looking on the lawn, which opened down to the ground, where Charley Addington was talking to his head keeper about some arrangements. Mrs. Addington was still at the table, and she called her to come and sit next her, and soon made her more comfortable, while Llewellyn, as soon as he saw she had come into the room, went out on to the lawn.

Mrs. Addington stayed talking a little to her while she made a pretence of eating breakfast, and then quietly carried her off to her own most comfortable room upstairs.

When she was there she said to her, giving her a kiss, "I am afraid, my dear Lily, that you did not sleep very well last night as you came down so late; you are generally such an early little bird."

Miss Featherstone looked up into her face, and saw by the half-amused, half-sympathetic expression in it, that she knew about what had happened.

Mrs. Addington drew her to a sofa, and putting her arm round her in a caressing way, said,

"My dear little Lily, I know a good deal about what happened last night, and I am very sorry for your distress and annoyance. But I want you now to tell me all about it, and we will see if we cannot put everything straight again."

"Oh! my dear Mrs. Addington," she said hiding her face on her shoulder, "does any one know all about it? How shall I ever look them in the face again! Oh! you must send me away at once, I can never stay here and

face them ; what must they think of me ! And how they will all laugh ! ”

“ No, my dear, they don’t all know it,” she answered. “ Charley told me, of course, and he sent Mr. Evelyn out fishing early, and if you don’t like to meet him again, he will send him away this evening. But the rest know nothing about it, and I don’t see why they should know, besides you have nothing to be ashamed of that a bad joke was played off on you and Mr. Llewellyn.”

“ But I don’t know what to do,” said the unfortunate girl. “ I don’t know how to look Mr. Llewellyn in the face. Oh ! it was a wicked thing of Mr. Evelyn to do.”

“ I don’t really think that you need distress yourself so much, my dear Lily,” said Mrs. Addington, “ you have done no harm ; but tell me more of what happened.”

“ Well, you see, I woke up with a start, and I saw Mr. Llewellyn with a candle by my dressing-table, and I gave a little scream and hid my face under the bed-clothes.”

“ And what happened then ? ” said Mrs. Addington, trying to suppress a smile. .

“ Well, I was very much frightened, and then I saw him trying to get the door open,

and looking very much frightened and confused too," she answered; "and very soon I saw how it was, and I could not help seeing the absurdity of it all. And he really behaved so nicely and considerately." And then she went on to describe all the scene of the night before.

Mrs. Addington could not help laughing, nor more could she herself before she had finished her account of it all, and she said at last,

"But I am afraid I did quite wrong, I never ought to have let him stay. I ought to have screamed at first, or to have rung the bell furiously, but I hate screaming, and the bell was by the fire, and I could not get out of bed, and after we had begun to talk so quietly it seemed so absurd to make a fuss, and have a crowd of laughing men round the door to see him come out."

"No, dear," she answered, "I think you were quite right, and behaved very well. I really don't see what else you could have done, and we will soon put it all right; you can stay in this room if you like for a bit, and I will take Mr. Llewellyn out with me. We are going out on the ponies, some of us this morning,

and I will see if he does not say something to me about it ; but we must settle if we are to send away Evelyn, or not, before the day is over."

"Oh! no, I don't want him sent away," she said, "that would seem too absurd. I would sooner go myself, but I must leave it all to you to settle; you are so kind and so clever, I am sure you will put it straight somehow."

"Well, my dear, I will try," said Mrs. Addington; "in the meanwhile you can make yourself happy here for a bit, and when we have gone out you can go down without any fear of meeting that Monkey, and no one but Charley knows anything about it, and I know you are not afraid of him."

So she gave her a kiss and went downstairs. She found Llewellyn and asked him if he would come out with her, as she was going a little way on the pony with some of the other ladies, and he was only too ready to have the chance of speaking to her.

They were soon ready to start, and set off into the mountains, Llewellyn walking by the side of Mrs. Addington's pony, and Sir Percy, who had taken complete possession of Lady

Waldermere, by hers ; the others all found something else to amuse them that morning.

They went on for some time, Mrs. Addington making the conversation, and asking Llewellyn all sorts of questions about his journey and all he had been doing lately, but he could talk very little, and evidently was struggling hard to know how to begin the subject uppermost in his mind. At last she saw that he would never begin about his night's adventure without her help ; she determined, therefore, to ask him about it without any beating about the bush, so she said,

“ You must forgive me, Mr. Llewellyn, for saying anything that may seem unpleasant, but you will be sure that I only speak with the desire of making everything go smoothly and pleasantly in my house. I want you to tell me about what happened last night, and see if we cannot avoid any disagreeable remembrance of it all. I know a good deal about it already.”

“ Do you ? ” he said with a look of relief. “ I am so glad, for I wanted to tell you about it, and I did not know how to begin.”

“ You see,” she answered, “ that Mr. Addington could not help finding out about what

he had done from Mr. Evelyn, and since then I have heard all about it from Miss Featherstone. I am sure you have nothing to reproach yourself with ; you behaved most perfectly about it all."

"It is very kind of you to say so," he answered, "but it was the most unfair and, I think, ungentlemanly trick of Evelyn ; I don't know how to forgive him. I don't care so much about myself, though of course it is very disgusting to be made look such a fool, but it is for Miss Featherstone that I think so much. If he had only left me for a few minutes it would have been bad enough, but for the night it was unpardonable."

"Well, it's fair of him to say he did not mean to ; but he went back to the library, and fell asleep in an armchair, where the rest of the men left him when they came up to bed. But you have a right to be angry with him ; and if you and Miss Featherstone feel that you cannot meet him, we will send him away."

"Oh ! no," he answered, "I don't want to break up your party, but I think that I had better go. I am sure Miss Featherstone cannot wish to set her eyes on my face again ; and if you don't want the yacht to-morrow, or

could help me get to Skye to meet the steamer, I had better be off, sorry as I am to have seen so little of you and of Glen Dhu."

"I think we can arrange it all without your going," she answered. "I am not going to let you run away the moment you have come to our out-of-the-way kingdom," and she could not help laughing to herself at the idea of the trio who it was proposed should all embark together to go away, and of their different faces as they met on the deck with no one else but the captain and crew on board.

"It's really not so much about myself that I care," he went on, "but I am afraid that Miss Featherstone will hate the sight of me; and I am so sorry for it, for I think her so very nice."

"I don't think that she is a bit angry with you, and she is only sorry for the way you have been annoyed and worried by it all; she said that you had behaved so beautifully," said Mrs. Addington.

"Did she really?" he answered. "That is most kind of her. I think that she is one of the most charming girls I ever met, and I should so much have liked to know her better if it had not been for all this, and I think she is

so pretty ; I never before knew half how pretty she was."

Mrs. Addington could not help smiling as she thought of Charley's remarks about Miss Featherstone's appearance that morning, and she said,

"But I see no possible reason why you should not know her as much as you like. She may be a little shy the first time you speak to her, but I am sure that there will be nothing more, so you need not think more of that, and I like her so very much, and think her charming too."

"Yes, I thought that you were very fond of her," he said, getting warm upon the subject and his shyness wearing off a little. "Do you know I never in my life met a girl I took such a fancy too, she is so pretty and pleasant, and she was so nice about it all in every way last night. You will think me very absurd, perhaps, Mrs. Addington, but I know how kind you always are ; do you know I cannot help half wishing that we were in France, where people's marriages are all made up for them by their friends. I should try and get them to make it up for me, but now I don't see how I can ever really speak to her again. Then, you see, I

don't really think so much of myself, though I know people think that I do. Of course as to fortune, you know all about that, but I should hate any woman to marry me for my money ; but though they do often laugh at me and think me conceited, I don't think I should be unkind to my wife. But after seeing so much of Miss Featherstone, I don't feel as though I was half good enough for her. I am really in earnest," he added, "so please don't laugh," for Mrs. Addington was trying hard to conceal a smile of amusement and satisfaction at the turn things were taking after all.

"But I am not laughing a bit, Mr. Llewellyn," she said, "and I don't think you conceited, and if I did not like you I should not have asked you to come here. Of course, talking about marrying is a serious matter, still, I don't see why you should not hope for the future ; you will both stay here for some days, and I can promise you that she is not prejudiced *against* you. But we can, I hope, soon put you together at your ease again ; you have neither of you done anything to be ashamed of for one minute, and the remembrance of this foolish joke will soon pass away with you, so we will begin to forget it from

lunch time to-day, and you must try to meet her as usual."

"I shall never be able to thank you enough," he answered, "you are so very kind about it all."

They talked on about the whole thing, about Miss Featherstone and her family, and all sorts of things connected with her, and Llewellyn got more and more enthusiastic about it all before they returned to luncheon.

At that meal he looked far more cheerful than he had done at breakfast, but Miss Featherstone, to whom Mrs. Addington would say nothing when she came in except that she had no time to talk to her till after luncheon, looked very far from comfortable, and quite avoided looking at Llewellyn, which rather disconcerted him in spite of all Mrs. Addington's assurances.

After it was over, Mrs. Addington took Miss Featherstone up into her own room to tell her the result of her morning's talk to her friend.

Mrs. Addington's own private room was a most charming place for a confidential talk, and any one who came into it could not help feeling that it deserved very much more use than it ever got. It was a corner room, and looked

out upon the loch, and at the same time had a beautiful view of the mountains, and up the glen that the river near the house ran through. The walls were covered with a light paper, on which were hung a quantity of pretty water colours, mostly of Scotch scenes, and the floor was of dark polished wood, with soft thick carpets prettily arranged about it. The fireplace was covered with white tiles and there was a log fire burning on old-fashioned brass dogs. Mrs. Addington declared that in the Highlands a small fire was always pleasant, while the arm-chairs and sofa were the most inviting possible and covered with a pretty bright chintz.* A few flowers completed a most charming room, and the whole fully carried out the fair mistress's assertion, that she, always made herself 'comfortable wherever she went.

When they had settled there on the sofa side by side, Mrs. Addington turned to her pretty companion and said, "Well, my dear, prepare yourself for the worst!"

"Oh, dear!" she said, "is he so much disgusted with me altogether? I was sure how it would be! How I wish I was safe back in England again!"

"He says, my dear," she answered, "that he is so much overcome by the events of last night, and by the way you behaved altogether, that he would like to marry you!"

"That he would like to marry me! what *do* you mean!" she exclaimed, opening her pretty eyes very wide indeed.

"I mean, my dear, that he thinks you charming, and says that he would like to marry you, that he thinks you perfection, and himself not half good enough for you, and he is afraid you will never speak to him again, and he wants to leave Glen Dhu in despair, so as you want to go too, and we think of sending the Monkey away, I think we might put you all on board the yacht together, and you would make a very happy family. Now what am I to tell him? That he must go away in despair?"

"Oh, no! I don't want you to let him go, but to marry him is quite another thing. I have never thought of it."

"Of course you have not, my dear Lily; young ladies never think of marrying till they are proposed to in proper form, but still the idea sometimes crosses their friends' minds, for them; and when they know a man wishes to

marry them, I think that then even the most proper may think about it—so you might think about it a very little. But I am not going to urge you for one minute, dear, for I think nothing is more cruel than to push some one into marrying any one they don't love, as it is wretched to be married to some one they can never care for, and here I leave it quite to you, only you might think for a day or two ; you are not called upon to answer at the moment. He is really a gentleman in every sense, and I think kind hearted and good minded, and of course about his position and fortune there is nothing to be said, for he is really very rich.

“ I do like him,” she answered, after a little thought, “ but I don't a bit know how much, and I have seen so little of him, but to think of marrying him all of a sudden is very serious, and perhaps he only proposes it as a very kind way of helping me out of my difficulty, and it would then not be fair to take advantage of his generosity. You see, dear Mrs. Addington, because by accident a man has passed, —oh ! I cannot say it !—but it is no reason one need necessarily marry him ! ”

“ No, my dear child, it is not, but I honestly believe he likes you very much ; any-

how I may tell him that you will see him, and talk to him as much as you can as though nothing had happened, and you two must settle between you what is to be done with that delinquent Master Evelyn this afternoon. I am going downstairs now, and you can come down presently, and I will give you a chance of talking to him."

"Well, I will try," she said, "but I feel so shy and nervous."

"Not more than he does, I assure you," said Mrs. Addington, and she went downstairs and found Llewellyn wandering about and waiting for her."

He looked very serious and uneasy as she came up to him, and said to him, "I have done what I can for you, and she is very nice indeed about it all, and says she will try to meet you as much as she can, as though nothing had happened, but the rest I must leave you to do for yourself. As you said this morning, we are not in France, so I cannot arrange your marriage for you, and I am afraid you cannot do your proposing vicariously. You must not be surprised if she is not ready to marry you on such short notice, but you will see the rest for yourself. If you wait about here, she will

come downstairs presently, and I will get the rest of the ladies out of the way, and you can have the conservatory to yourselves for a long time, but I have told her that you two must settle between you if Mr. Evelyn is to stay on here or not, so now good-bye, and I wish you good luck ! ”

He murmured something about her being most kind and good to him, but he could not say much ; and she left him lounging about in a nervous sort of way, while she managed to get all the rest of the party well out of the way for the next two hours.

What exactly passed in the conservatory in these two hours Mrs. Addington could never get a very distinct account of, and the conversation between the couple was, as far as she could learn, at first of rather a cold and shy order ; but when she came at the end of that time into the conservatory, she saw the pair sitting together in a most confidential manner, and Llewellyn jumped up, and escaped into the garden, looking very red in the face as soon as he saw her.

“ Well, my dear Lily,” she said, coming up to her, “ are we to send Mr. Evelyn away ? ”

“ No, dearest ! ” she said, throwing her arms

round her neck, "we have forgiven him, and," she added in a whisper very timidly, "I have promised to be Mr. Llewellyn's wife! Oh, you don't know how nice and good he is!"

"I am so glad, my dearest child," said Mrs. Addington, "and your mother will be so pleased about it."

"But, dear," added Miss Featherstone, "it's to be a secret for a week, we don't want people to know it; they will think it's so funny that it should all have been done so quickly."

"You can announce it when you like, dear, or leave them to find it out for themselves, but you will write and tell your mother all about it; there is no post till to-morrow in these outlandish regions, so you will have plenty of time to write, and I will write to her too. Now I must send a note up to the exile, and tell him that he may return, and I hope this may be a lesson to him, though the moral of the story is, I am afraid, a very bad one for him."

Mrs. Addington sent a note off to the Monkey telling him to return, and to come in by the back way, and straight up to her own room, and in due course he appeared. She meant to give him a severe scolding, but he put on such

a comical face of penitence, and she was in such an amiable frame of mind at the way everything had turned out that she found it impossible to help laughing.

“Will the happy pair forgive me?” he said pulling a very long face.

“If they forgive you,” she answered, “I am not going to so easily, unless you put on much better manners in my house; seriously you don’t seem to know what a very wrong thing you did last night.”

“But I never meant to keep them prisoners so long, really and truly I didn’t, but I forgot it all as I was looking at the whist, and fell asleep. But do tell me what happened, I am dying to know. I would have given anything to have been behind the curtain, and watched the expression of the prince’s countenance.”

“I’m not going to tell you, if only to punish you,” she said; “but now look here, you must make me a promise as a condition of pardon, not that it’s much use, for you have broken one promise already, but you will see that as a gentleman you must hold your tongue, and not make Miss Featherstone a laughing-stock to every one here and elsewhere.”

“Oh! yes,” he said, “of course I’ll promise

that, but she will be very good if she will forgive me and bear no malice, and I will give up chaffing the prince for her sake; but do tell me, are they great friends? Did his highness press his suit in the small hours?"

"Well, if you'll promise to hold your mischievous tongue, I will tell you that they are engaged to be married," she answered.

The Monkey cast his hands and his eyes up to the ceiling, and then threw himself down on the soft rug at her feet, and fairly rolled with laughter; at last he said,

"Well, that's the best joke I ever played in my life! and the whole idea is too delightful. But I should think you *ought* to forgive me, for it's just what you wanted, and the idea of it would never have entered his thick head if I had not helped him. Oh! goodness! what a splendid joke it is! I suppose the sight of her in her nightcap pleased him so that he could not get over it, and he wishes to gaze on it for the rest of his natural existence. I am sure I ought to be godfather to the first little prince!"

"Now, Monkey," she said, "just you moderate your mirth a little. Young ladies don't wear nightcaps, and I won't have you

go on making a joke of Lily Featherstone, so please do remember it."

"I really will try to be good," he said, picking himself up, and planting himself on a stool at her feet, "but, you see, I can see in your pretty face that you have forgiven me."

"I am afraid there is no hope of really mending your ways, you impudent boy, so I shall have to give you up at last, I know," she answered.

"But not just yet," he said, "and I shall hope to spend many cheery hours with the charming lairdess of Glen Dhu, but at any rate she will allow that All's Well that ends Well!"

CHAPTER V.

It did not require a week to elapse before the whole of the party at Glen Dhu were fully aware of the engagement between Llewellyn and Miss Featherstone. As Master Evelyn had said, it was great sport to him to watch the prince spooning, and though he was, after the frequent injunctions he got from Addington and his wife, pretty orderly, he could not resist a word now and then. The happy couple were so wrapt up in each other that they did not take much notice of him, and had quite left off thinking if the rest of the party knew all about their nocturnal adventure or not.

In truth it was pretty well known to them all, it had been told to one and another in the strictest confidence, and like all other secrets, had been handed on in the same strictest confidence, but it was not thought fair to allude to

it, at all events at present. Lady Waldermere had found it out the first day, having scented the air of mystery that there was about the day's doings after the eventful night; and not being so entirely engrossed in her conversation with Sir Percy when she accompanied Mrs. Addington on the ride—as the fascinating baronet would have wished to believe—when Llewellyn was suggesting that that lady should do his proposing for him,—she had discovered that there was something of very particular moment passing between the other couple of their party.

Not considering it likely that the “Welsh prince” was pouring out the story of his love for herself to Mrs. Addington, she had had no hesitation in asking her afterwards what had happened in the house, and the two ladies had gone into fits of laughter over the whole scene.

It was two or three days after this that Charley Addington settled to have a drive in some of the woods nearest the house, and as a great part of the end to which the deer were to be driven was accessible to ponies, the ladies of the party determined to come and look on, if the weather was at all endurable.

It was luckily a brilliant morning after a wet chilly day, so that the chances were in favour of some of the stags having come down *into the shelter of the woods.*

When the party met at breakfast the Monkey, whose get-up was always irreproachable in neatness, took an inspection of the party, to see if he could not find a subject for his light chaff. He had quite recovered his native impudence after his recent scolding, and though he avoided the subject of locks and keys, he could not forego his favourite amusement of getting "a rise," out of the prince.

That gentleman had been obliged to put on garments of a "sub-fust" hue, such as are enjoined by the statutes of the University of Oxford on undergraduates, in consideration of not making himself conspicuous during the day's sport, but he had evidently determined to dazzle the eyes of the fair Lily Featherstone by the elaborate pattern of his stockings.

After gazing pensively at them for a time, the Monkey said to him in a distressed tone,

"Oh ! but prince ! I thought that you would have come out in the full garb of the rulers

of the principality ! You have only got the stockings on,—I thought that every Gael both in Wales and in the Highlands wore a kilt on grand occasions ; and with your personal advantages for the dress, I am astonished at your appearing without it.”

“ Why don’t you put those thread paper legs of yours into one ? ” he answered in a huffy tone, for legs were not the strong point of either gentleman.

“ I am afraid of the wind,” he answered, “ and I am not by nature or birth a mountain chief ; Mrs. Addington, don’t you insist on chieftains wearing kilts on these occasions ? ”

“ I insist on little boys eating their breakfasts,” she answered ; “ you know by this time that they should be seen and not heard, and I may tell you that I do not think that the rough legs of a man appearing from under a kilt, are by any means a pleasing sight, even up in the Highlands ; but if you are very anxious to show yours, I will see if we cannot find one for you, and you shall dance the sword-dance for our amusement.”

“ He’d be more at home in the monkey’s hornpipe,” suggested Llewellyn.

After this the Monkey made several attempts

to excite the prince, but Mrs. Addington came to the rescue every time, for she had determined to save him from his attacks, and Wilfred St. John came to her assistance with several sarcastic remarks about the young gentleman himself being a type of the boy of the period, as he called him.

Breakfast had to be finished in good time, as the place for the drive of the morning was five or six miles away; and by dint of much exhortation from Charley, every one had been got under weigh before ten o'clock.

They started from the house along the road to the farm, which was the only piece of road that anything on wheels could go along within five-and-twenty or thirty miles of Glen Dhu, and as the utmost length of it was three miles, it was hardly, as Mrs. Addington remarked, "worth bringing her pony carriage up there."

The party left the road after about a mile, and turned inland up a beautiful glen, through which ran one of those short and rapid rivers of which there are so many in the Western Highlands. At times it was a roaring torrent and full of salmon and sea trout, and as long as the storm lasted was capital fishing, but it very soon ran out again when the rain was

over, and subsided into a succession of pools, and a pretty rapid stream between them which ran among rocks worked into the most fantastic shapes by the torrent. The pools often were full of salmon, who remained prisoners there till another storm enabled them to move on, and they could be seen lazily rolling about at the bottom of the pools, treating with utter scorn the most tempting-looking fly.

The track they took after leaving the road ran along by the course of the river, sometimes close to its banks, and at others high above it, when from the narrow path they seemed to look straight down into the water foaming among the rocks far below.

“Do you really mean, Mr. Addington,” asked Lady Waldermere of Charley, “that a salmon can get up through that hole in the rock, down which the water must pour perfectly straight?”

“They do manage it, however,” he answered, “for I have caught them up above this, and they must have got themselves up there somehow.”

“I should have said that they must have been born there, if I had not got so learned in the natural history of the salmon since I came

up here," she said ; " certainly when one sees the glorious wild scenery in which you fish up here, one wonders less at the fascination of it. I can quite fancy the charm of spending hours alone in such a grand spot as this, among the dark overhanging rocks. But tell me where are we to find the deer to-day ? "

" All along in that wood," he answered, pointing to a long stretch of birch and firs that covered a great part of the side of the mountain across the glen. " We shall go to the other end of it, and the guns will be placed behind rocks at intervals from the top to the bottom of the wood in the places where the deer come out, and there are a lot of ghillies and shepherds waiting now at the other end to beat it up to us, down wind, as soon as we are ready."

" But do the stags never turn round and charge the beaters ? " she asked ; " I have heard of red deer being so savage, and we have a few in Waldermere Park that I am afraid of, and never let the children go near."

" Oh ! no ; they never charge, except when they are wounded, and then sometimes they are dangerous when you go near them ; they will now and then break back through the

beaters where the covert is thick, but they don't try to hurt them. This wood is so thick that I let the shepherds take their colleys in, to keep the deer well on before them ; if they start a roe-deer, you will hear the whole pack in full cry."

"How pretty it must be !" she said ; "and are the stags very shy generally ?"

"Nearly always," he said, "but there was a curious thing happened to me in this very wood two years ago. The beaters had come right through it up to where we were, and had driven everything out of the wood, when one of the old stalkers, old Archie, who is a splendid character,—I will show him to you presently,—came running up to me, speechless with excitement, and forgetting in it the few words of Saxon he knows ; at last he succeeded in making me understand that he wanted me to follow him as fast as I could. I thought that there must have been some accident, so I trotted off after him over a frightfully rough line of country, and at last arrived panting at a place where I saw his brother Ronald, who I thought had gone mad, and that Archie had brought me to see him. He was standing still, and swaying his body gently from side

to side, singing in a monotonous voice an endless Gaelic song, about God knows what, and as soon as he saw me he pointed wildly into the thick brackens close to him and went on singing. Old Archie gesticulated wildly too, and I could not for my life make out what was the matter, as he would not or could not speak, and only made signs towards the place; so I walked on to where he pointed, with my rifle in my hand, while Ronald sang more furiously than ever, when all of a sudden, right at my feet, there jumped up a very fine old stag with a splendid head; I let go both barrels at him, and missed him clean, in my astonishment, to the great disgust of the two brothers, and Ronald then explained to me that he had seen the 'baste' lying there, and had charmed him while Archie came to fetch me. That is really a true story, Lady Waldermere, though I don't think I should have believed it if it had not happened to me myself, so you need not unless you like."

"Why, Ronald must be a sorcerer or wizard," said Lady Waldermere, "the followers of Michael Scott must still exist in those dark glens. Have you many stories of these sort of things up here?"

“There are plenty of stories,” he answered, “but it is very hard to get hold of them ; the people dislike talking about them very much, partly because they think you will laugh at them, and not a little from the old idea that it is as well not to stir up those powers by talking about them. But you asked me about stags being dangerous, and I can tell you a curious thing which happened to Ronald once. He used to have a wonderful terrier that could do anything, and nearly always came stalking with him, a thing they would very seldom let a terrier do. One day there was a report of a stag with a most wonderful head, in this part of the forest, and we wanted to get it. There was no one staying at Glen Dhu, so Macdonald, the head keeper, and I and those two brothers, all went out to try to get a shot at him. Ronald found him and stalked him, and got a shot, only he missed him. The stag stood still and looked at him and then charged him. He had nothing to run behind, and did not know what to do, so he dropped his rifle, and picked up his little rough terrier, Prince, and pitched him into the stag’s face. This stopped him a bit while he had time to bolt, and the dog kept barking at him and getting out of the way of his horns,

till Ronald was among the rocks and out of his way."

"What a dear dog!" she said; "but has he got him still? I should so like to see him."

"I am afraid that Prince has gone where the good doggies go," he answered. "One year when I came up I asked after Prince, and Ronald said,—‘Ah! he got old, he’s dead.’ I asked him if he should take to another like him; but he said, ‘I think not, I don’t think God would ever make another dog as wise as Prince,’ and he said it in such a simple way. You would hardly believe how fond that rough ghillie was of his dog. He nearly upset a whole boatful of people coming back from a funeral, with a great deal of mountain dew in them all, when the river was flooded, and his dog was being washed down by the stream, and when he grew old he would go back for him and carry him across the swollen burns."

Charley Addington went on telling her stories like this as they went along the rough track. They had crossed the river once where there was hardly any water in it, and they were now going along with the river on their left hand, and the dark masses of rock and wood rising upon their right.

“Do you have guns right up on the top?” she said.

“Yes,” he answered, “we have them all round the end when we have enough, and I am sorry to say that your husband has to go to the top. We always make it a rule to draw for places, and he drew the highest, so he will have rather a scramble up there. I have been lucky, and have the lowest, and if you like to stay with me behind my rock, you can see a great deal of the drive, and perhaps something will come near us.”

“Oh! I should like that very much,” she said, “but I am afraid Henry will not enjoy his climb up to the top at all. But what do you do when it is over?”

“We have lunch, and then we drive that hill-side over there by the loch that you can see up that glen,” he said, pointing out another long wood to her up a wider glen.

They soon reached a narrow part of the glen where the wood above them ended, and the mountain side became too rocky for anything to grow upon it, and here they halted.

Macdonald, the head keeper, then started with the men who were to shoot, and went up

the mountain side, posting them at their different places in the order of the numbers they had drawn before starting. Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Macdonald stayed with the ponies, and the lunch, and the boy who was to take care of them, in a place where they could see all that was going on without being in the way. Lady Waldermore went with Addington to his post behind a rock, from which he could command anything that might cross the glen, rather to the disgust of Sir Percy, who had the place next above, and who invited her to come and see his skill with the rifle. Mrs. Addington, who was becoming very thick with Wilfred again, and who was rather proud of her climbing powers, followed him up to his place, and the fair Lily Featherstone could not be separated from her Welshman. Evelyn, who was following them up the hill-side, kept up a running chaff; and as in a moment of weakness Llewellyn had expressed some misgivings about the softness of the muscles of his calves for want of hard exercise, the Monkey was continually inquiring after their condition, and recommending rubbing and cold-water bathing as very hardening and good for them.

At last they were all in their places ; and Sir Henry had arrived very warm and very much out of breath at his perch on the top, where he wrapt himself in a warm coat that Macdonald had carried up for him, and placed himself in a commanding position on a soft bed of heather, on the sunny side of a rock, and well sheltered from the wind.

The signal was given, and distant shouts now and then borne on the wind, showed that the men had begun to drive.

The first thing that appeared was half-a-dozen hinds and three or four calves, which came bounding out of the corner of the wood, and passed within forty yards of where Addington and Lady Waldermere were. Then there was a crack of a rifle, followed quickly by another report, and Colonel Macdonald felled over a good stag, and missed another. A short interval followed, and the shouts of the beaters became more distinct, and the occasional barking of a colley was heard, when suddenly four stags came slowly out of the wood between Sir Percy and Addington. They looked round them in a suspicious manner, and tried to sniff the presence of their enemies in the air. The

first was a really fine old fellow with a good head which he carried in a defiant sort of way; he led the way at a majestic walk to start with, which he soon quickened to a trot, and presently came within reach of Addington's express. He took a steady aim and rolled him over with a bullet through his shoulder at nearly a hundred and fifty yards. The one following him gave a start and half-stopped, when there was a crack from Sir Percy's rifle, and he gave a spring into the air and set off down the glen; he fired again but missed, and the noise turned him straight towards the rock behind which Addington and his companion were. He waited with his other barrel till the stag came galloping by within thirty yards, and then rolled him over dead with a bullet through the heart. Directly after, some rapid shots were heard above, and soon a few more hinds and calves came by as fast as they could gallop, and looked most pretty as they leaped the river at a bound, and went up the opposite mountain side at a tremendous pace. Another shot or two was heard above, and by this time the noise of the ghillies and shepherds was growing very near, when the colleys suddenly got on

the track of a roe-deer that had lingered in the covert till the last moment; and a very pretty sight it was to see the little creature bounding out of the brackens and rocks, with half-a-dozen active mountain-bred colleys after it.

"There's a hunt for you! Lady Waldermere," said Addington, "rather different-looking colleys to those sleek half-bred Gordon setters with their well-brushed coats that follow the young Guardsmen up and down Piccadilly. I don't think they would be much in it over that country. We can go and look at our prizes now, for there can be nothing more in the wood, unless Ronald is charming another stag for me inside."

They went to look at the nearest stag first, which was a good one of eight points, and Addington was examining it to see where Fitzroy had wounded it.

"In the thick of the neck, I see," he said; "he would not have gone so very far, without my assistance; now we'll look at my big friend."

They walked on towards it, and by the time they got to it Sir Percy was standing by.

"A nice beast, Addington," he said, "and a very good shot, ten points, and a very good head."

"But how small his horns are!" said Lady Waldermere; "why, we have much bigger ones in the park at home, and I thought wild ones would be much finer than the tame ones."

"No; I'm afraid we cannot compete here with your park-fed gentlemen, and the horns of the stags on the west coast are much smaller than those in the forests farther east. But this is rather a good one for this forest, and even you will allow that he looks a beauty."

"Poor fellow," she said, "it is quite sad to see him lying there so solemn with his large eyes still looking at us. I am afraid I am not hard-hearted enough. I am always rather sorry for the animals that are killed."

"And I must say," said Sir Percy, "that after I have cooled down from the moment of triumph, and have seen my prize buried in his temporary grave away from foxes and ravens, with nothing but his antlers showing out of the heather, and stones over him,

I cannot help feeling a little melancholy on looking at the fallen pride of the monarch of the glen."

While they were talking the others came down the hill-side, and the ghillies dragged the bodies of four more stags down with them; and every one was relating what he had seen, and giving reasons for not having shot half-a-dozen more. Miss Featherstone was in a state of delight at her young man having killed a stag, and was nearly as pleased as he was himself; how far off it was when he fired there was no need of saying.

The bodies of the stags were dragged to the stream, where the last rites which the old foresters take a pleasure in describing from some unaccountable love of the nasty, and which go by the euphonious name of "gralloching" were performed on the victims, and the party walked back to where they had left the ponies, to have luncheon.

"But what has become of my respected spouse?" said Lady Waldermere to Charley, as she looked round and saw all the party assembled and no signs of him.

Charley turned to Macdonald and asked him if he had seen him, but he had not, so a

fleet-footed ghillie was sent up to where he had been stationed, and by the time they were well on with their meal, the baronet appeared looking as stately and solemn as ever.

“Why, my dear Henry,” said his wife, “I was wondering what had become of you, and I was getting quite alarmed by the delay in your appearance.”

“I was resting a little,” he said, “and I stayed a few minutes to enjoy the splendid view from up there.” But the ghillie informed Charley Addington that he had found the respected baronet rolled up in his coat and fast asleep on his soft warm bed of heather in the sun; and he amused Lady Waldermere very much by telling her of it after luncheon.

A short time was allowed for the consumption of tobacco, and then they started to take up their places for the drive of the afternoon, which was very much a repetition of the one of the morning, and they were all in the house again at Glen Dhu before half-past six.

The ladies had much enjoyed the sight, and Miss Featherstone was in a perfect heaven of delight with everything. Lady Waldermere

stuck to Charley Addington most of the day, now that his old friend was taken from him, and she seemed rather to wish to avoid the very marked and perpetual attention of Sir Percy Fitzroy, but he managed to get by her side on the way home again.

Wilfred devoted himself to Mrs. Addington and Mrs. Henderson, but he did not enjoy himself, for he felt hurt at the evident way in which Lady Waldermere avoided his society, for no reason that he could think of but the caprice of a woman, and he felt pained at the idea that she had seemed to really enjoy his companionship so much, but only as long as there was no one there who amused her better. He tried hard to look upon Sir Percy with a friendly eye, but he found it very hard to be as indifferent to anything she and he might do and say, as he managed to appear.

After dinner Addington produced a tappit hen, and the party drank their own good healths in the best of Lafite, over which they killed more stags than there were in the whole forest of Glen Dhu.

CHAPTER VI.

THE days went by at Glen Dhu, and the time was approaching when some of the guests were to depart. They had fished and stalked and made expeditions in the yacht; and they had driven some distant woods which, being on the sea-shore, they had gone to in a large party in the yacht, and altogether they had had their fill of the enjoyments which a charming place like Glen Dhu, in the hands of pleasant and hospitable hosts, could afford.

No special incident had marked the time since the eventful night which was to turn Cinderella into a princess before the autumn was over, but feelings were raised, and impressions formed, which might bear their fruit in due season.

Llewellyn and Miss Féatherstone seemed to be day by day approaching nearer and nearer

to the seventh heaven, wherever it may be, and neither of them ever for one moment had any misgivings as to the wisdom of their mutual choice, or of their very short courtship and rapid engagement.

Mrs. Henderson enjoyed herself extremely in her own way. She now and then lamented her unkindness which had kept Frank Digby away ; but she never had any misgivings as to the devotion of Wilfred St. John, and even the Monkey Evelyn used to pay his share of devotion to her charms, and to amuse him, self by sitting on a stool at her feet, and gazing pensively up into her eyes while she gave him good advice, till at last she could not make out if he was in jest or earnest, and began to think that her mature charms had made a serious impression on his youthful and tender heart.

Since the arrival of Sir Percy, Mrs. Addington had seen more of Wilfred again, when Sir Henry was not carrying on his solemn and very innocent flirtation with her. Sir Percy seemed to wish everybody to see how much he monopolised Lady Waldermere, and that lady appeared to take it as a matter of course, and to anyone watching her it would have been

impossible to say if she encouraged him or not.

To Wilfred St. John, Sir Percy seemed hardly to care to conceal that he thought himself his rival, and Wilfred thought he could detect a malicious pleasure in him in endeavouring to interrupt his conversations with Lady Waldermere on every possible occasion, and in making a sort of display to him of the preference which he assumed that she had for him over Wilfred.

Sir Percy was a clever talker, and he liked to show it. Whenever he and Wilfred happened to be joining in a conversation, and Lady Waldermere was there, he used to put on a brilliant style of talking, and never let Wilfred get in a word if he could help it, and he evidently wished to impress his hearers, and that lady in particular, with the idea of how clever he was, and how witty and brilliant. He used to talk about the power of the conversation of the *salon*, which, he said, was quite lost in England; and then he used to chatter away with the evident intention of showing that if men would only learn from him it would soon be revived again.

Wilfred cared little enough for Sir Percy's

evident efforts to annoy him, and he listened with amusement to his long discourses, sometimes amusing, sometimes tedious, but in spite of himself he could not help being hurt at the almost marked neglect that Lady Waldermere showed for him, after the delightful terms of friendship they had been on, and he could not help thinking that something must have been said to prejudice her mind against him. He would much have liked a chance of asking her, but in spite of growing coldness she was always so polite, and at times really pleasant again, that she never gave him the chance of asking her if he had done anything to offend her.

He had seen enough of Lady Waldermere to know that she was quite as capable as any man or woman to separate the chaff from the wheat in any one, and could see easily enough what was real in an apparently brilliant conversation, and what was only glitter; but in spite of his love of display, there was no denying that Sir Percy was an unusually clever man; and that he had great powers of pleasing women, his past history, which Wilfred knew something of, left no doubt. Then he was very good-looking, as Lady Waldermere

had, he then *thought, rather pointedly* remarked on the day he arrived there, so that there was nothing to prevent its being natural enough that she should prefer him to Wilfred. His tone irritated and exasperated him, but he trusted that he had sufficient command over himself never to let any one see it, yet it spoilt very much of the pleasure of his stay at Glen Dhu.

At last the time had come when Wilfred St. John's visit was to end, and he was going to stay a few days with some people in Perthshire on his way south.

On the last day but one he had been to a river seven or eight miles away from the house to fish, and after some very fair sport was walking home as the evening was drawing on. The weather was stormy, and the effect of the lights and shades up the deep glens was magnificent. The spot where he was, and all the side towards the sea, was lighted up by a gleam of the setting sun which was going down in a mass of stormy clouds of every gorgeous hue. The sea and the mountains near it looked only more brilliant in the sunlight, for the dark back-ground of this storm up in the mountains beyond him. There the clouds

were gathering so thick that, it looked as if the top of the glen was shrouded in black darkness, while across it was a rainbow of the most brilliant colours, part of which was abruptly cut off by a gigantic mass of rocks. Out of the dark glen a stream now swollen to a torrent foamed along, its dusky waters flashing into gleams of white foam in contrast to the gloom it was leaving, and it dashed onward among its rugged rocks three or four hundred feet below the path on which he was walking.

The wildness of the scene and of the weather were not unsuited to the thoughts that were passing through his brain, as he made his way towards the house at Glen Dhu. He had been there a month, and it seemed to him as though he had spent a great part of his life there. He had grown so familiar with the whole place, and he had learnt to admire the wild beauty of it all more and more every day, so that now he felt a sadness at saying farewell to it all. There must always be a certain feeling of melancholy, he thought, in leaving any place we have grown very familiar with, and have felt very much at home in; and strange though it may seem, even for a place in which we have been

far from happy, there is a cat-like love as for a familiar spot, so strong, that he had heard of captives who were at last restored to freedom after long captivity casting a look of almost affection upon the spot where they had endured so much misery for years. How much stronger then the feeling of regret at leaving a most lovely spot where he had been very happy !

It seemed to him that this place had been like a shelter to him for so long, a safe and quiet retreat from the bustle and noise of the world, and all its cares and anxieties. Now those days of quietness and repose seemed over, and the world was to be once more faced, with all its coldness and hardness. Then, as his thoughts wandered on, he tried to look into the future, and a sadness come over him when the thought of the failure his life had been, and how aimless and objectless it was at present. Gleams of his old energy and ambition came over him again ; the wildness of the scene, and the stormy weather round him, seemed to stir up some of the old adventurous and energetic spirit that there still was in him ; and as he strode along with quicker steps, and felt the wild mountain breeze blow around him, he .

thought—"The time is not yet past ; I can still do something in the world again, and make myself a name worthy of the powers which I know are in me."

But vague and unreal were all these thoughts, nothing but ideas—dreams floating through his mind—aspirations after some undefined height, but not practical resolutions that would bear any fruit. So he felt, as his burst of enthusiasm died away and left him to think of the dreary reality of life, and his thoughts grew more and more gloomy, while the storm overtook him, the setting sun was hidden, and he was enveloped in thick mist and drenching rain. Presently from the place which he was so soon to leave, his thoughts wandered to the party that he was going to say farewell to for the present. It seemed as though he had been living a lifetime with them all, and as though they were the old familiar friends of many years ago. It seemed impossible to believe that four short months ago he had only known two of that party, and had lost sight of these two for years, and that he had only known vaguely of the existence of the one of them whom he had thought most about.

And then his thoughts turned to her more

and more, and he lived once again in his mind the delicious days of the early part of their life at Glen Dhu, down to the time of his conversation with her on the lawn that afternoon when the rest of the party arrived to dissolve his dream of pleasure. How well he remembered that scene, and how distinctly he could recall every word of their conversation under the shady pines, and the feeling of pain and irritation which made him rush away into the solitude of the mountains. Then there came before him again all those thoughts which had then troubled him so much, as he had watched from his place among the rocks that gleam of a light dress through the pine branches so far below him. Another fortnight had passed by since then, and though during it he had spent many a pleasant hour, he had felt quite cut off from that friendship with her, which he found he had begun to value so much. He well remembered the sudden shock which had passed through him then, when he for one moment feared that the thought of Lady Waldermere was likely to stir emotion in his heart that he believed to be long since dead, which it would be madness and misery to let it stir up, and how he had then resolved that

he would prove to himself. she was but a charming friend whom he could meet with pleasure, and part from without pain, but who had no special power over his feelings, and would never in any way influence his life. Such then were his thoughts, and his determination, and what was the result? In spite of everything, when he dared to look into his heart, it was the parting from Lady Waldermere that made leaving Glen Dhu so sad. But what was it in him that caused this? He could not analyse his feelings enough to tell. Certainly she had done little enough in the last fortnight to attract him to her, and to the place. It was evidently no mere accident that had prevented him having any more of the long delightful conversations of the days gone by with her. She evidently wished him to see that he must become no more intimate with her. But what on earth could be her reason? Could he have offended her in some way? He felt instinctively that that was impossible. Had she seen that he was in danger of becoming too fond of her, and had she taken this way of stopping it? That was possible, almost probable, still he did not believe that he had even in any way shown any deep feeling to-

wards her, he was sure that he had always been so guarded with her, and had avoided paying her so many of the little compliments that almost ordinary politeness now and then demanded in society. Was she tired of him? That was possible, but it was a painful thought, for he had been building up in his mind hopes of a delightful intellectual friendship with her which should last for years, and should draw his mind up to her higher and purer level. And now must all that dream dissolve! Did she now find in Sir Percy Fitzroy a pleasanter and a more congenial companion? Why not? He was handsome, clever, brilliant, and he was acknowledged by women to be most fascinating, but somehow, he hardly knew why, he had never thought Sir Percy was the man to fascinate Lady Waldermere. Still he might have done it, and certainly if determination and persistent attention could do it, he might well have succeeded; and Wilfred felt that he knew nothing of how long or how intimately they had known each other long before he came upon the scene. But it was painful to him to think that Lady Waldermere could care for Sir Percy, apart from any feelings of jealousy which the idea might rouse

in him. He knew Sir Percy's standard of morality, and under that brilliant exterior, he knew how selfish and unscrupulous he was; and he had raised for himself such a lofty ideal in Lady Waldermore, that he hated to think that she was now the object of the pursuit of a clever and heartless libertine. That she had anything to fear he could not believe, but to him it was a desecration of her, the simple idea that any man could look upon her in such a manner,—she, so lofty in soul, so high-minded and pure! But then, while these thoughts passed so swiftly through his brain, he felt suddenly,—what made him think of her as so high and so different from other women? Did it not seem that his admiration,—it could not be his love for her—that was absurd, and did not exist,—but that his admiration for her had made him set her up on a pedestal that only existed in his imagination? Her character had always been to him a deep mystery, and there had seemed to him to be in it contradictions which he could not understand. He had seen her such a good wife, so patient and even tempered, and never put out by all the tiresomeness of her most unsympathetic husband; then such a loving and affectionate

mother, and her kindness and unselfishness he had seen had made every one love her who had to do with her ; and he knew from the long days of intimacy with her, how truly great and noble in the highest sense her ideas had always seemed, and what a strong sense of duty and knowledge of right and wrong she had always shown. But, on the other hand, she was in some senses so much the fashionable lady, the woman of the world, so gay, so fond of admiration, and of being admired and perhaps envied. Then at times how almost frivolous in her talk, then how cynical and cutting in what she could say,—all these moods and phases he had seen, and the extraordinary mixture had always puzzled him, and now perplexed and distressed him more than ever. Was she all real, all genuine, and sincere, or was she nearly always acting a part ? And even if she were insincere, which was the true side of her and which the counterfeit ? Was it possible for such apparent inconsistencies to exist in one woman ? He had longed to know, but he felt that he never should now, that the hope of that delightful friendship had gone, and could never return, and who was to take his place ? And with a feeling of anger he thought again of Sir Percy. Then in spite

of himself all sorts of wild and horrible thoughts crowded into his brain, and he walked on faster and faster through the gathering darkness and driving rain to try to escape from these dreadful ideas of what the terms Sir Percy was now on, or might some day be, with Lady Waldermere. On he went setting his teeth and determining to show her how little he cared what she did, and that he now fully understood that she was a brilliant and heartless coquette, and who could know what else besides ! He would let her know, and he would prove to himself how little he cared. At last just as it got dark he reached the pine woods, and his path to the door led past the conservatory, which he so well remembered, and as he approached it in the stormy darkness he could not help remembering the lovely moonlight scene there on that first delightful evening of their arrival, and of how he had sat by the softly plashing fountain in the dim light, and had looked up into the lovely dreamy eyes of his beautiful friend. He came to the glass door with his mind full of that delightful vision, and turned his eyes to where she had sat that evening, but he gave a start of furious anger at what he saw. The soft rosy-coloured lamps had been

lit, and by the light of them he could see that same fair lady sitting in the same chair, and by her side Sir Percy leaning towards her, and talking with the deepest earnestness, and on her face an inscrutable expression which he could gather nothing from. He would not stay to watch them, though the temptation flashed across him, but he was almost certain that as he was moving on he saw Sir Percy try to take her hand, but what she did he could not see. In spite of all his resolves he reached his room, mad with rage and jealousy, and then furious with himself for feeling it. By the time he had changed his wet clothes he had managed to bring himself to order again, and he went down to the drawing-room, which he entered as though there was no conservatory near the house, or any such lady in the world as Lady Waldermere, and he played go-bang till dinner-time with Mrs. Henderson, whom he talked to in his lightest and gayest way, and whom for some reason he found in an unusual state of excitement, and more flighty and spasmodic than he had ever seen her before. Just before the dressing-bell rang, she said to him,

“I am going to ask you to take care of me as far as Perth the day after to-morrow, Mr. St. John.

"I am delighted to hear it," he said, "but I thought that you were going to bless the shades of Glen Dhu with your sweet presence for another week?"

"So I was," she answered, "but I have letters from England which tell me I must be in London as soon as possible, so I shall go with you in the yacht to Balmacara, on to Inverness, and straight through from Perth to London."

"I hope that nothing has gone wrong, or anything unpleasant has happened," he said; "it would be most sad that your pleasant visit here should be cut short by anything disagreeable."

"Well, I can hardly call it that," she said, "but it is no secret, so I may as well tell you myself as leave you to hear it from anyone else,—the fact is that a cousin of mine has died, whom I know very little, and shall find it very hard to mourn for as I ought, and has left me a great deal of money, and a charming house in Eaton Square."

"But I am so glad to hear it," he said. "I know no one more able to make a good use of wealth than Mrs. Henderson; and though Rochefoucault thought that the misfortunes of

our friends are pleasing to us, I am happy to say that I can rejoice in their good fortune too, and I know you will believe me when I tell you how much I do in yours."

"Yes, I am sure I do," she said; "I know you would neither rejoice in my misfortune nor be sorry when I prospered. But now I have told you, I must run away and dress; we shall have lots of time to talk about my plans for the future on our journey south."

That evening at dinner, Wilfred was sitting next Mrs. Addington, and during it she said to him, "Have you heard of the great heiress? Did the young widow impart the interesting news to you over the go-bang board before dinner?"

"Yes, she did indeed," he said; "and I find I am to have the honour of escorting so much wealth south the day after to-morrow."

"You are," replied Mrs. Addington, "and I give you warning that Charley means to give you some good advice on the subject before you go; you can guess pretty well what the import of it will be."

"And have you any advice to give me?" he asked, looking at her.

"I never give advice on such matters," she

answered. "I think people had better judge for themselves ; and if things go wrong I won't have any one try to lay the blame on my shoulders. I told our friend Lily Featherstone to judge for herself, and you must do the same."

"But as I have never thought about it, cannot you give me a hint?" he said.

"I know you are not serious," she answered, "so it doesn't matter what I say, but if you like I will say that you might go much further, and fare a great deal worse."

"I don't think that I am serious," he answered, smiling, "but you shall know all that happens, I promise." •

"And don't forget, whatever happens, that you are to come to Lily's wedding in November. I have promised that she shall be married with due honour from our house ; then as I have brought her so far on her way, I am going to render my work complete, and I want to collect as many of the party here as I can to be at it, and we will go to the theatre and have some fun."

"Is the Monkey to be best man?" said Wilfred."

"Well, I haven't heard that yet," she said,

“but they would be very rash if they trusted him again.”

That evening Wilfred devoted himself more than ever to Mrs. Addington, and almost made a parade of his devotion to her, when he knew that Lady Waldermere was looking at him. But in vain did he try to detect from that lady's face some clue to what was passing in her mind, it was all in vain, she was always pretty, always bright, but always incomprehensible. Before the evening was over, some of them were collected in a little group, among whom were Sir Percy and Lady Waldermere. He was holding forth about women, and saying that all that was said about their fickleness and insincerity was so untrue, and that they were really far less of coquettes, and far more apt to express true feelings, than men.

“Do you think so?” said Wilfred, who by some impulse could not resist the temptation of trying to say something cutting. “You have had a large and varied experience of the charming creatures, Fitzroy, I know, but I am afraid I cannot quite agree with you, and I am sorry to say that I believe there is quite as much insincerity, and far more coquetry in them than among men.”

"Come, Mr. St. John," said Mrs. Addington, "are you going to condemn us all at once sweep?"

"Not for one minute," he answered, "but I cannot allow Fitzroy's assertion to pass unchallenged, for as far as my experience goes, I have seen and really known instances of coquetry and insincerity that have perfectly astonished me. I am not saying for one minute, Mrs. Addington, that there are not in the world numbers of charming and perfectly sincere women, but I have in my life been so sadly and dismally deceived, by discovering that women whom I had thought the models of all that was good and noble and sincere, were nothing but heartless coquettes, and a composition of vanity and selfishness."

"You speak very bitterly, Mr. St. John," said Lady Waldermere; "may I ask if you have often come across the monsters whom you describe?"

"No, I am happy to say not often, Lady Waldermere," he answered, "but often enough to make me regret that I have made such a discovery, and that I have been so disillusioned of my idea that I was on my way to discover perfection, when all the time it was only a brilliant and clever counterfeit."

“What shall we do to you to shake you out of this cynical humour to-night?” said Mrs. Addington. “We have no counterfeits here at any rate, no brilliant and clever shams, so you need not be so bitter upon us, because of these unpleasant women that you have met in the course of your wanderings ; we are all good and true,” she added, laughing.

“St. John is thinking of the ladies of other lands,” said Sir Percy ; “he has found so much insincerity there, that he has become disgusted with the whole race of women, and forgets that his fair countrywomen are of quite a different nature.”

“Perhaps you are right, Fitzroy,” he answered, glancing at Lady Waldermere’s face. “I fancy at that moment I was thinking of ladies who were not English, but what I was thinking mostly of,” he added, “happened long ago, so let us hope that the nature of women has changed.”

“Or let us hope, as it happened so long ago, as the old woman remarked, that it is not true, and that you will view them and judge of them a little more fairly in future,” said Mrs. Addington.

“Perhaps Mr. St. John deceived himself

even in the instance he is thinking of," said Lady Waldermere in a quiet voice.

"He has always wished that he could believe he did deceive himself," said Wilfred.

"Well, we've had enough of this discussion, let us go and see the end of the great billiard match between our Monkey and his Welsh prince," said Mrs. Addington. "I suppose the lily maid is scoring; let us hope she puts on now and then for her prince."

And so saying she led the way to the billiard room, where they saw the game out, and then the ladies retired to bed.

Charley Addington did not let Wilfred depart without giving him what he considered the most friendly advice, couched in the very plainest language.

"Now, my dear Wilfred, look here," he said, "don't you be a fool, you go right in for her, and marry her off. You will get on splendidly with her, and it is quite time you left off playing the fool with other men's wives; you ought to have one of your own. And you have known our widow for ages, and would get on splendidly together. What I am so afraid of is that you will go on shilly-shallying, and not come to the point, while some more

enterprising and determined sportsman cuts in and carries off the prize."

"Well, I'll bear your advice in mind, old boy," he answered, "but how do I know that the fair widow would have me?"

"Oh! she'd have you fast enough, I am sure of that," he answered; "you have only got to stick to her, and if she said, 'No' at first, she'd soon say 'Yes,' if you persisted a bit. Now, do be sensible for once in your vagabond life, if only for the sake of your friends. Why, you can give the best of dinners, have a moor, or hunt, or come into parliament if you like. Ten thousand a year in real money! Why, you will end by being Prime Minister; a rich widow is the way to it, you know."

"Well, you make it sound very tempting," said Wilfred, laughing, "and as I am to have a long journey with the charming creature, I will think it well over."

"Well, mind you do, old boy, and don't let it slip through your fingers," said Charley; "and if I were you I'd cut Perth and follow her up to London straight; strike while the iron's hot! That's the only way!"

"What a pity you can't marry her yourself, Charley!" he said.

“ Well, if I hadn’t a wife, I’d bet I would cut you all out, and carry her off from under your very noses ! You are one of the men who think they know such a lot about women ! But I’m sure you’ll go and make a mess of it,” he growled.

CHAPTER VII.

Two months had passed away since Mrs. Henderson and Wilfred St. John had steamed up the narrow sound of Sleat, from Glen Dhu to Balmacara, on their way to Inverness, and had left behind them those rocky shores and dark mountains on which the heather was changing from purple to dark brown, and the brackens and birch trees were putting on the many-coloured hues of autumn.

They had travelled together as far as Inverness, where they had just stayed the night, and the following day Wilfred had seen his wealthy heiress as far as Perth, where he had parted with her after safely depositing her in a compartment of the mail for London; with special injunctions to the guard to deliver her safely; but in spite of all Charley Addington had said, he remained in Perthshire, and for

two months he had known nothing of the fair widow except from two or three short letters which just informed him of her existence and her doings. She seemed to have been busy with lawyers, found that her house wanted very little to be done to it, and so had got into it very soon; was paying a visit or two, intended to go abroad for the winter, and hoped to see him in London at Miss Featherstone's wedding before she departed.

Wilfred himself had passed the time in the way that many young men who are quite idle, and have always a supply of ready money enough for travelling expenses, so often spend it, if they have the power of making themselves pleasant to the ladies of a house, and can shoot straight enough to add a proper share to the day's bag to please the master, and his lot had fallen in pleasant places where the grouse and partridges were plentiful, the ladies agreeable, and the champagne dry.

He had heard from Mrs. Addington of what little had happened after he left Glen Dhu, and of their journey south, but there had been nothing very special. She retailed a joke or two of Charley's about the widow, and some of his exhortations to him not to be a fool! She

casually mentioned the Waldermeres, and said she believed that Sir Percy was going to stay with them at Waldermere Park, and remarked that she had no doubt he would have a good time there, as it was a charming house. He was to be sure and come to Miss Featherstone's wedding; after which she intended to establish herself at Kirthorpe, and hunt hard all the winter, and he might come and have a gallop across Northamptonshire with her if he liked.

' So two months went by; during which the rich and independent arranged their amusements and occupations for the winter, and the poorer returned from their autumn holiday to earn their daily bread in that state of life,—in which they earned it. The first frosts had brought the leaves off the hedges, the cubs were coming to months of discretion and growing into foxes, and London had involved itself in a mantle of mud and dirty-brown fog.

Wilfred St. John had passed the two months pleasantly enough, and had endeavoured to let the thoughts of the past, or the cares of the future trouble him as little as he could. Every now and then some thoughts of the strong feeling that had passed over him of regret at such a waste of time and abilities

came back to him ; but if it made him sad for a short time, the pleasant ease of the life he was leading soon sweetened the little bitterness which these thoughts infused into the cup of pleasure.

Often and often, both intentionally and in spite of himself, had he reviewed the weeks he spent at Glen Dhu, the early and latter parts of his visit, the contrast of them, and the many struggles that he had had in his mind ; and though it had not passed away, the impression of it all was less strong, and he had recovered from the bitterness which had made him say such hard words the last night but one of his stay there. • He hoped that he had quite mastered his feelings, whatever they might have been, about Lady Waldermere ; and that he should meet her in London as a most agreeable acquaintance, and show her that the few words he had spoken, and the feeling which he had allowed her to see that he had about her change of manner towards him, were only the little ebullition of a slight temporary annoyance, which had quite disappeared. After all, in the past he had had lots of little flirtations which had now and then brought some momentary feeling of annoyance, or some petty

pang of jealousy, but these had been always quickly forgotten, so that was settled satisfactorily. The idea of making these sensations of any real importance, was like the magnifying each one of the many *liaisons* of a Don Juan, which—with the help of a little hot blood, of time and of scene, and an infusion of the *quasi*-poetic spirit into the whole—sound so tremendous, into the real love and life-long passion of some man with deeper, truer, but less effusive and showy feelings than those of the Don.

The middle of November found the Addingtons in their house in Prince's Gate, and as many of the Featherstone family stowed away in it as it would hold. The evening before the wedding they had a dinner party in honour of the bride, and managed to collect at it a considerable number of the late inmates of Glen Dhu, who all knew the secret of the fatal key, and the sudden engagement.

Mrs. Henderson appeared looking extremely blooming, and as though the cares of her large fortune sat very light upon her; and Frank Digby was there too, having returned from his yatching trip with his companion of evil celebrity, but not a bit abashed by the rebukes

of the widow, on the bad choice he made of his companions. Llewellyn turned up of course very early before dinner, and in spite of the guests assembled let his devotion to the fair Lily be very manifest ; and very late appeared Monkey Evelyn, who had no time to make one joke before he was sent down to dinner with a scolding for unpunctuality, to which he was only too well used. The way the different guests had discovered that they had business in London in the middle of November was very astonishing, and among them Sir Henry Waldermere, who seemed to have a perpetual lawsuit going on, if any one might judge by the frequency with which he had to visit his legal adviser, and the perpetual visits he had to pay to London on business of importance.

Wilfred St. John was in the drawing-room of Mrs. Addington's house talking to Miss Featherstone and Llewellyn when the Waldermeres were announced. He disengaged himself from the lovers, and turned towards the part of the room she was in, feeling a wish to see how she would recognise him and receive him, after the way in which he had parted with her, and quite determined to show her that all idea of any disagreeable feeling had

passed away, and that she was only an ordinary acquaintance to him.

She was turned away from him, talking to a most comfortable lady of middle life, who looked most thoroughly the mother of a large family, and to whom she had just been introduced as Mrs. Featherstone, so that she did not see Wilfred at first, nor until he had come quite close to her, when she turned round and shook hands with him most cordially, and without the slightest shade of embarrassment in her manner. He did his best to return it, but he could not help feeling a shade of vexation come over him at feeling that she had so entirely forgotten the past. They talked in a casual sort of before-dinner way till they were interrupted, and directly afterwards dinner was announced. The party was large, larger even than a very good dining-room could properly hold, for Mrs. Addington's hospitality had extended to as many bridesmaids and bride's relations as she could possibly find room for, and though, through the crowd who were seeking for places in the dining-room, he saw Sir Percy Fitzroy making a struggle for the place next Lady Waldermere, he followed his impulse to take it himself, and deposit the

bridesmaiden, whom he had in charge, on the other side of him.

He could not help watching Lady Waldermere, and he thought that he had never seen her look so lovely before. Her white dress and necklace of pearls only showed the brilliant whiteness of her neck and soft rounded arms, and she wore no other ornament than a deep red rose in her bosom and another in her hair, which was done plainly and tightly round her beautiful head and showed its graceful shape, instead of following the fashion of disfiguring it with a mountain of hair. Her complexion looked fresher, and she looked younger and more provokingly pretty than ever, and appeared to be that evening in unusually high spirits, for she set to work to chaff Charley Addington, who was next her, in a way he had scarcely ever heard her do before on their noisiest evenings at Glen Dhu.

After watching her for some time, and getting a few words from her now and then, while he paid disgracefully little attention to the damsel on the other side of him, to whom Mrs. Addington had recommended him as a most agreeable man, he said to himself, "After all she is all surface, and nothing but frivolity."

Then as he got so little of her conversation he felt vexed and annoyed, and the thought came across him, "If I had let Percy Fitzroy sit here, she would have talked to him fast enough." Then he felt disgusted that he should still have any such sensation, but there flashed across him the recollection of a beautiful conservatory, and of a breezy hill-side and a rough pony close by him. Presently she talked to him about anything that turned up in an off-hand manner, till Charley Addington broke in across her with some most pointed remarks of a jocular nature, and questions which alluded to a wealthy widow, till he felt himself getting hot and uncomfortable at not knowing how to answer him, while Lady Waldermere seemed thoroughly to enjoy his embarrassment, and to encourage Charley in his jokes. Altogether he was rather pleased than not when dinner was over, for even when Charley Addington had given him up and turned to his other neighbour, he could not talk pleasantly and at all at his ease to Lady Waldermere, and was at last glad to rattle away to his youthful bridesmaid, who was astonished at his suddenly found power of talking which lasted till the ladies departed.

The cigarette immediately after dinner was a luxury which had to be foregone this evening in consideration of Miss Featherstone's father, who, as well as an uncle, a dignitary of the Church and the performer of the next day's ceremony, did not understand interrupting the ladies for a good half-hour, and were quite ready to give their opinion upon the current politics of the day, watered, as our French neighbours call it, with a bottle or two of the highly recommendable Bordeaux that Addington provided for his friends.

The politics of the moment were fully discussed, the chances of a dissolution before another year was over, and the prospects of the Conservatives, but, as all the party were either red-hot Tories, or very mild Liberals, the discussion was not enlivening. At last Monkey Evelyn, who was becoming bored to death by the dulness of the talk, and the slow pace at which the bottle went round the table, engaged the clerical uncle in conversation, and after alluding to the approaching wedding, began to discuss with him the subject of divorce, and in order to draw him, as he expressed it, said all he could think of to prove what an admirable institution it was. He was evidently

successful, as it "drew" Sir Henry Waldermere too, very considerably, and the talk became animated in the extreme, Frank Digby coming to the rescue of the Monkey, who was getting very much "sat upon," to use his own expression, by the dignities of the party; and at last Sir Henry closed the discussion in a magnificent sentence by saying that, "The culmination and perfection of the Christian morality was found in that high and severe doctrine of marriage, against which we might confidently anticipate, and almost venture to predict, that the anti-christian spirit would direct its first great attack, encouraged by those preliminary operations in the legislative recognition of divorce which had already, from a variety of ill-omened causes, found a place upon our own as well as upon other statute books!"

"There!" said the Monkey in an undertone to Wilfred who was near him, "if old Frank can engage a man who can use such long words, and has wind enough for such a sentence, he is a precious sight cleverer than I am."

This splendid peroration was in truth a clencher to the argument; and it having got so serious, Charley Addington changed the subject by proposing some startling innova-

tion in the poor-law, and requested Sir Henry to pass the bottle while he rang for some more claret; for, as he said afterwards, he was obliged to have something to wash down all that jaw.

At last even the charms of the poor-law were exhausted; and while the elders of the party proceeded upstairs in a leisurely and dignified manner, button-holing each other on the staircase, and chuckling over the way they had shut up the juniors, the shut-up ones were grinning over a hurried cigarette about the used-up old arguments that had been so solemnly fired off at them, which from their being so time-honoured, their users imagine must be more efficient than any new ones, just as many an ancient imagines that the celebrated weapon at Dover, known as Queen Elizabeth's pocket-piece, or the gun of endless length adorned with every barbaric device, which graces the tilt-yard in front of the Horseguards, are far more efficient than the mischievous little arguments of war that later artillerymen have forged.

When they reached the drawing-room, the champagne at dinner, the claret after it, and that whitewash of old Madeira, followed by coffee and a "chasse," had taken the gloomy

cobwebs out of Wilfred's head, and he was in a frame of mind in which after considerable depression succeeds an unusual rebound. He saw an empty chair by Mrs. Henderson, and taking it he began to talk away to her in the most intimate and confidential strain. She was amused and flattered, as he had quitted her a couple of months before in so cool a frame of mind, and there he sat and talked, and paid her compliments and looked into her eyes, in the way that only an accomplished old flirt knows how to look, more particularly when made bold by a very good dinner. As he was talking to her, various thoughts passed through his brain, warmed by the rosy vintage, the thought that after all she was decidedly good-looking, not more than two or three years older than himself, most good-tempered and easy to get on with, and it was quite evident that she liked him; he had known her for years, and always liked her very much. What reason was there that he should not spend the rest of his days in domestic peace with her! She might not be brilliantly clever, she might not have the fascination of the beautiful woman opposite to her in that very room, but her character was as open and as easy to read as the

family Bible. There was no enigma about *her*, her little harmless vanities, her innocent and amusing belief in her own power of perception, were plain enough, and mattered little enough; and if she *was* a little commonplace in her character, she was more than commonplace in her kindness of heart. Then the easy life he could lead; as Charley Addington said, he could give her friends the best of dinners, he could hunt to any extent, and *there* was a temptation to a man who had revolved in his mind which was the finest sport in the world, to be first in a really good run, to be in the most exciting moment of stalking a splendid stag, or close on the trail of a party of red-handed Indians. The latter delight was in all probability out of his reach for the rest of his life, but the other two might be his as long as he could walk or sit on a horse. Or he might begin a parliamentary career, he knew he could speak, he was still young, and who knows to what heights he might not rise in twenty years!

All these thoughts crowded upon him as he rattled away, and fixed his eyes from time to time upon the meek brown ones of the caressing-looking, pleasant-tempered woman at his side, and he made himself as pleasant as ever

he could, resolving to think it well over the following day. Once he detected a glance from Lady Waldermere, who, he thought, must be watching him, and in a moment the feeling shot through him that if he married Mrs. Henderson, he would show *her* at any rate that he was not carried away by any infatuation for the incomprehensible beauty ! But this flash of feeling was followed instantly by one of pain which he could not analyse, but which made him bring his *quasi* love-making to an end, and make room for Frank Digby, who was soon rattling away to the fair lady as fast as ever Wilfred had done.

Wilfred went across the room to where Mrs. Addington was the centre of a rather noisy group, the chief assistant at which was the irrepressible Master Evelyn, who had been just carrying on in the most desperate manner with one of the bridesmaids ; and when Mrs. Addington had come to know what was the cause of the fits of laughter of the young lady, he had answered,

“ Oh ! Mrs. Glen Dhu, you have come too soon and spoilt it all. I thought that imitation was the sincerest flattery, and as I am most anxious to do anything flattering to the prince,

I have chosen the most charming of the bridesmaids, and after having made love in the most correct form, I was just on the point of proposing when you interrupted me ! ”

And in real truth he had told the young lady of the courtship of the happy couple, and could not resist playing with her the scene of the bedroom as he declared it had happened, and was on the point of proposing to her in the words that he swore the prince had used, when Mrs. Addington came up. The young lady, half shocked and very much amused, had laughed herself almost into hysterics by that time, and as Mrs. Addington saw she could not now unsay all he had told, she allowed him to go on with the proposal in an irresistibly comic manner. She tried to scold him, but he said that the secret did not matter now, as the only amusement he could ever have again would be by locking him out of, instead of into, the fair Lily's chamber, but he would try and do that if she liked.

The party broke up at last, and as they were going out, Wilfred found himself lighting a cigarette on the doorstep at the same moment Sir Percy was going out, so that their departure together was inevitable, and it be-

ing a dry night they started to walk down the Knightsbridge Road towards Piccadilly.

Each of the two men felt that the other was his rival, but neither of them would have confessed it for any amount of torture he could imagine. They were no boys striving together for the love of some blushing damsel, who wear their hearts upon their sleeves, and whose eyes and cheeks proclaim their sense of rivalry and jealousy whenever they meet. They were two men very much knocked about in the world, who would both have utterly denied that there was any possible cause of rivalry between them, and they talked away now as though they were the best friends on earth. They talked of days long gone by, and the sight of the Knightsbridge Barracks reminded Sir Percy of his old soldiering days, and started a mine of anecdotes and stories which lasted them well up Piccadilly, and into a club to which they both belonged, where the charms of whist enrapt them till well into the morning, and for the time swept away all thoughts of fair ladies, whether spinster, widow, or married, and from which each departed to sleep the sleep of the innocent and the just till the dim November light of morning should bring in the

day for the wedding of the fair Lily Featherstone. Wilfred could not help thinking, as he walked to his abode in Piccadilly, that it was not much more than a hundred years ago, when two gentlemen in the position of Sir Percy and himself would have found some polite excuse for crossing their swords by the side of the road they had just walked so amicably along, and within sight of the windows of the very house they had just quitted, and then he rolled into bed, trying to persuade himself that he was no rival at all of Sir Percy, and endeavouring to dream of the charms of the fair widow.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE following morning a small crowd at the door of the fashionable place of worship in Wilton Place gave evident signs that a matrimonial alliance was about to be contracted between two members of the upper ten.

The descendant of a long line of Welsh princes was at the door in very good time, looking pale but resolute. His "get-up" was magnificent, and he had evidently allowed the fashionable establishments which had the honour of clothing him to provide him with the most approved things in wedding garments. The bluest of coats, the yellowest of nether apparel, the stiffest of white waistcoats, and the most voluminous of light-blue scarfs with the largest of pearls in it, and the shiniest of boots on his feet, formed the chief features of the bridegroom, whom there was no mis-

taking when he arrived. He scorned to sneak in among the crowd as merely a looker-on, and attended by a worthy-looking best man he drove up to the door in his own brougham, with a coachman who had adorned himself with a mass of flowers, large enough for the driver of the Lord Mayor's coach on a state occasion.

The bridegroom was as usual too early, and the bride nearly too late, and most of the friends who were in London, and who were to witness the interesting ceremony, had arrived at the church before the fair Lily appeared. The unfortunate Llewellyn was fussing about, getting more pale and nervous, when at last his enemy the Monkey appeared, and walked straight up to him, and, after wishing him every joy of the day, asked him in a most audible whisper if he should take care of the key of his door for him? The poor prince was so limp at the moment that he was obliged to sue for mercy, and said to Evelyn, "Do please leave me alone to-day, there's a good fellow; you had your joke, and if you got your laugh, I got the best girl in England for my wife by it, so let us say quits, and have done with it. I am sure I bear you no ill-feeling about it."

"All right, old man," answered the Monkey, who was most good-natured at heart. "I will say no more about it, and I hope the princess will forgive me equally, and then I shall feel I have done one good deed in my life."

In the warmth of the moment, Llewellyn held out his hand, and the two were better friends for ever after, though a slight joke now and then was more than Evelyn was able to resist.

The ceremony was performed with all due solemnity, the proper number of officiating priests, and a collection of fair bridesmaids, the number, names, and dresses of whom were all sent to the 'Court Journal,' in the best and most polished of English, together with a summary of the grandeur of the lineage of Llewellyn and of the wedding presents, by a joint effort of Mr. Llewellyn's gentleman and the maids of Mrs. Addington and the future Mrs. Llewellyn.

A short exhortation on conjugal duties was delivered by the performing uncle, who added to the remarks in the service one or two more about the patriarchs and their exemplary lives, though, as Wilfred remarked to Mrs. Addington, he hoped the prince would not

follow the example of more than one of them, and make love to that pretty maid of his wife's, when he was a little tired of the fair Lily; and, as Balzac calls it, take a little Hagar into the domestic circle.

The vestry was of course crowded, and Mrs. Featherstone took up a good deal of room in a very stiff silk dress of gorgeous hues, and wept a few tears of mitigated sorrow at losing one of her large brood; but she seized upon the prince and kissed him audibly, very much disturbing his hair and scarf in the operation, and, turning round upon Charley Addington who was close by her, she relieved her feelings by giving him a good smack before he knew where he was.

The Monkey declared he ought to kiss some one, and he made a considerable effort to salute his bridesmaid, as he called his friend of the evening before, behind a door in the house, but what his success may have been was unknown. He boasted however of having been quite successful with the extremely pretty maid who was to accompany the happy couple, and bore the evidence of of the truth of his assertion in the shape of

five distinct finger marks on his smooth pink cheek when he appeared at the breakfast.

At last it was all over, the usual old jokes and old remarks were used over again, and the couple departed with the regulation white horses, a white slipper on the roof of the brougham, and enough rice down Llewellyn's back to make him uncomfortable for a good deal of the journey, while the party who remained felt very much as though they had been to a ball, and kept it up till the middle of the next day.

Before they all left the house, Mrs. Addington arranged that they would go in a party to the theatre that evening, and by way of a variety, that they should dine together at the Pall Mall before going. Lady Waldermere would come, but Sir Henry was not given to the theatre and begged to be excused, Charley Addington would accompany his wife on this occasion, and both Fitzroy and Frank Digby were coming, so Mrs. Macdonald came to make a fourth lady.

The party agreed to dine in the coffee-room, as the idea of a private room was very dull indeed, and the ladies thought that they

would be much amused by the company. They were not very long at the table before they had their first amusement in the shape of the sudden appearance in the room of Master Evelyn, with a lovely companion in the shape of a well-known actress, who was more celebrated for her good looks than for her histrionic powers, and who consequently used the stage more as an amusement than a profession.

The Monkey had taken his table, which was at the further end of the room, and was surveying the room in a nonchalant manner before sitting down, when he caught sight of the amused faces of his friends in the distance, and for half a minute, for once in his life, he looked rather taken aback, but his self-possession returned in a moment and he sat down at his table with half a grin as he caught Charley Addington's eye.

"I don't think we ought to have come here," said Mrs. Henderson.

"But why not, may I ask?" said Addington.

"Well, I don't think we ought to expose ourselves to running against people like that," she replied.

"But for goodness' sake," said he, "do tell

me why you mind meeting an actress in the public room of an hotel, more than looking at her on the stage, or sitting next to her in the stalls there for that matter."

"Perhaps I can hardly tell you why," she answered, "but there is a great difference."

"Different here in England to what it is abroad you must mean?" he said. "Come, don't you remember when we were together in Geneva, two years ago, and the little woman in golden hair sat by you at the *table d'hôte*—yes, actually in the next chair—and touched the sacred hem of your garment? You were more amused than scandalized even when she addressed you in a foreign tongue, which you, however, speak like a native, so why should you mind the Monkey feeding a distinguished lady of the theatrical persuasion in the same room as you even here in our native Albion?"

"Well, as I said, I hardly know how to explain my meaning to you," she answered; "it is more a feeling than a thing which can be expressed."

"Like a very great many of the sentiments and feelings which regulate society," said Sir Percy; "they are only sentiments.

Now do you know, I always think,—I say this with all deference to other opinions,—but I always think that when a motive for action or conduct, after fair reflection, cannot be explained, there cannot be very much reason in it. I am not speaking of impulses, or of the blind obedience of a child, or other unreasoning being, who obeys a mentor like an automaton, but of those people who consider themselves capable of judging the actions of others, and therefore can, of course, give a reason for their own. I consider that when as an answer to your question, as to why they do or think a particular thing, they say because they are sure it is right, but can give no distinct reason for that feeling, I believe then there is no real reason, no distinct principle involved, and that they are merely following the dictates of prejudice, or have a blind faith in certain laws and impressions which have been forced upon them. What do you think, Lady Waldermere?" he said, turning to that lady. "I always consider you a most unprejudiced person."

"I quite agree with you," she answered, "that every one should be able to give a reason for the prejudices they have, but

very often one is only following the convention of society, and never thinking of the cause of the conventional rules."

"But you must allow that the whole world of society is not likely to be wrong," said Mrs. Henderson.

"My dear Alice," answered Lady Waldermere, "I don't question it for a minute; but as you know, I was not brought up in English society, so there are in it an immense quantity of little rules which I can give no reason for whatever, and I often think utter nonsense, but I follow them most implicitly. I feel that I know its rules but not its reasons for them, and if I broke what I thought a very little commandment, I might find that it was one of the great ones. You know what the holy man, I almost think his name was Vincentius, said, 'I believe because it is absurd;' in precisely the same way, I obey because it is absurd, and I do it for the sake of peace and quietness, just as heaps of people believe for precisely the same reason."

"Bravo! Lady Waldermere," exclaimed Frank Digby, "if we only had a few more people like you to help us less conventional parties, we should soon regenerate society."

"Oh! I'm not going to help you to regenerate society, Mr. Digby," she answered. "I can tell you, you have expressed views to me that I don't hold with much more than the ones I have called absurd."

"What a sad disappointment," he cried, "I thought she was coming over to us. Now, Mrs. Addington, won't you strike a blow in the cause of freedom?"

"I am afraid," answered that lady, "that a new edition of the laws of society is beyond me. I was bred up in the existing ones, till they became matters of life and death, but I confess to having frequently attempted the evasion of them, but then I always felt like a little child doing wrong, and thought I ought to be whipped for breaking rules."

"But that is just the spirit which I complain of," said Sir Percy, "an unreasoning obedience to a lot of old women's prejudices and rules."

"Do you expect every one to be a law to themselves then, Sir Percy?" said Mrs. Addington. "I am quite ready to be to *myself* if you will get that curious creature society to agree to allow it, but I will not always undertake to give you any reason for my conduct beyond that I like what I am doing, and do what I like!"

“For myself I would sooner have that,” he answered, “than a great deal of the conventional nonsense that now makes so much society stupid which might be most agreeable. But Lady Waldermere will support me in saying that English society is most prejudiced.”

“Certainly she will,” answered Lady Waldermere, “but so is most society. I grant you that it is possible to find here and there a sort of society which has freed itself from such prejudice, and which may be charming, but it is at times hard to regulate it, and the men own no regulation but the code of honour, and duelling, as far as I can see. Each society has its advantages and disadvantages, but of course there is more excitement and *go* in the untrammelled society, and in good hands it is at times delightful; but we might as well discuss the course of civilization at a dinner-table, as the origin and the present state of the laws of society in England and elsewhere.”

“Well, I come back to what I said at first,” said Mrs. Henderson, “that I feel that there are things one should do, and things which one should not do; and I know that I am right, whether I can explain myself or not.”

The party could not suppress a little laugh

at the determined way in which the good widow came back to her resolute opinion, and Frank Digby said,

“Quite right! Mrs. Henderson, quite right! I do like to see people who feel sure of their position, and as good old Tate and Brady express it, who know what’s right, nor only so, but also practise what they know!”

“But I suppose if I practised it properly I should not be here,” she answered.

“Not be here, my dear Alice!” said Mrs. Addington, “why we are here in the correctest of ways; I with my lawful husband, and two ladies with the full consent of their liege lords, while you, happy mortal! have no need of any person’s consent but your own.”

“Well,” said Charley Addington, “I feel very much edified by this discussion, which has been brought on because the Monkey has a fancy to give a dinner here to the fair Nelly, whom you can see for a few shillings almost any night in tights before the footlights, and very good legs she has I will say,” he added, “though she can act no more than I can.”

“Never mind her legs, Charley,” said his wife, “but give me some more champagne.”

“Certainly, my dear, and, as you say, they

are no business of mine ; I wonder if this champagne will make me ill to-morrow, but it is very good to the taste just now. Mrs. Henderson, allow me to give you some more to help you sustain the shock your nervous system has gone through here to-night. I will send the Monkey to apologise to you to-morrow."

"For goodness' sake don't," she said ; "he is nearly as bad as you."

"As me! *moi, par exemple !* I never bring actresses to the Pall Mall !" he exclaimed.

"Not now, Charley," said Frank Digby with a grin, "but I think Wilfred could remember a dinner here once upon a time if he made the effort."

"Oh ! hang your efforts," said Charley, "and let the past be, for goodness' sake. We were all boys once, and the Monkey is one now."

"Don't you believe that *I* was ever at any such dinner," said Wilfred to Mrs. Henderson with a smile.

"I believe you are all one as bad as another," she said, "but I never thought it till lately."

"It's very sad that your eyes should ever have been opened," he answered. "but I fear they see too much now."

"Well, they want to see no more," she answered. "I don't like to be disillusioned about people."

"Rather difficult to do it," Wilfred thought to himself; for the good Mrs. Henderson always returned to exactly the same opinion of any one, or about anything, if she did not choose to change it, in spite of anything he might hear.

While they were talking dinner had progressed, and having declined all offers of dessert they had arrived at the coffee. Wilfred was sipping a glass of chartreuse when he observed to Lady Waldermere,

"I am always amused whenever I drink this curious liquid to think of the holy fathers who, between their prayers and for the good of the holy mother church, composed this comforting drink for the inner man of sinners like me. It is delightful to think of them turning their attention from the perpetual wrestle with the ghostly enemy to the mixing of a stomachic cordial! Don't you remember the splendid description in the 'Moine' of the dear nameless Abbé who wrote the 'Maudit' of the Pâte de l'Umbilicus and the Liqueur la Karrofine?"

"Oh! yes," she answered, "and About's

account in 'Le Mari Imprévu' of the monastery founded by the old *dévo*t of Lyons, where they made a fortune by their liqueur. One would have thought that the force of absurdity could no further go, but I don't suppose the holy *padrés* see it for one minute themselves, any more than the righteous brewer sees the absurdity of building a church and a school with the money which he makes from the publichouses between and on each side of them, where his name figures in golden letters six feet in height, and where the parents of the school children get drunk when not in the church, which is seldom enough."

"Oh ! they do it as a sort of hedge," said Sir Percy, "they would tell you their liquor was very wholesome if taken in moderation, and that it would be wrong to deprive the free citizens of the right of drinking it. 'The use they make of their money reminds me of the description of the man who warmed himself and made a god out of the same billet of wood ; with part of the money they get from the drunkenness of the people they build the church and schools, which represents the god of the owner of the block of wood, and with far the larger part they make a warm house, and have

several little luxuries besides a good fire, and at some distance from their brewery they preach of temperance, righteousness, and the rest, but not as applying to themselves."

"It's a sort of compounding with the—well, I hardly know whom," said Wilfred, "but I prefer them,—humbugs though they are,—to the people who enjoy and hoard, and then try to cheat the devil by leaving their money to good works. Certainly a man who gives is worth ten thousand who bequeath, and who get a lot of posthumous credit by enjoying their wealth as much as they could while alive, and then *do* their natural heirs when they die. I remember *à propos* to that a splendid couplet which old Jeremy Taylor quotes from a tablet on a wall in Lombard Street :

Man thee behoveth oft to have this in mind,
That thou givest with thine hand, that thou shalt find,
For wives be slothful, and children beth unkind,
Executors beth covetous and keeps all that they find,
If thou ask, where the dead's goods became,
So God help me and Halidam, he died a poor man !

"Yes, it's very good," said Sir Percy, "but it gives a most practical reason for giving instead of bequeathing, and I have always

esteemed old Jeremy Taylor as a very practical man, though I cannot say I am deeply read in him."

"Oh, yes!" said Wilfred, "but a man who could see the practicality of that advice, was not one to encourage a man to cut short his heirs, and leave his money to a lot of priests who are to do nothing but repeat a form of words, a sort of fetich, to save his dirty soul from the frizzling it well deserves in purgatory, and from which he hopes to escape by doing his heirs after his death out of what he has made by robbing during his life."

"Well, when you have done that tremendous discussion about Jeremy Taylor and purgatory," said Charley Addington, "we will go to the theatre. I don't know what's come to you people to-night, first the Monkey comes to dine here with a fair friend, and you have a long discussion on the laws of society, and then Wilfred gives himself the stomach-ache with a glass of chartreuse, and again he and Percy Fitzroy are upon their horses, and talking the deepest—well, sense we'll call it, about monks and brewers and purgatory."

"We may be inconsequent in our talk, but it amuses us, Charley," said Wilfred, "and

though our noise may not mean much, you know that conversation is very good for the digestion."

"Then I am sure you won't have the night mare to-night," said Charley.

They all adjourned to the play, which they did not find more than usually exciting; but they all laughed together, more than at anything on the stage, when suddenly in one of the stage boxes there appeared again the ubiquitous Monkey and his fair companion,* and they could see him retire to the back of the box, and explode with laughter himself.

The party found the time pass pleasantly enough, quite as much from the charms of their own society as from those which the piece afforded, which Charley Addington said reminded him of the immortal Smiley's jumping frog; for like that great man's friend he could see no man's 'pints' about the piece that made it better 'nor any other piece,' than he could about the frog. They listened to as much as they could, and they talked considerably too, when not deafened by the strains of a brass band playing all the popular airs of the street, with which the manager of every theatre seems to think it *de rigueur* to annoy

his audience, who would, many of them, pay half as much again to be without it.

The curtain down, the party made their way as well as they could along the crowded and intricate passages, so suggestive of safety in case of fire, to the entrance where was to be met every convenience for finding a draught, and catching a cold, but not for waiting or finding a carriage. The other ladies had all gone before Lady Waldermere's carriage came up to the door, and as soon as it was there, Wilfred, who happened to be speaking to her, went to help her into it. She had got her foot upon the step, when two very restless horses, which were in a carriage that was just behind, started forward, and ran the pole through the panel of her brougham, and made her horses start forward. Wilfred had time to catch her, and save her from being knocked down; but in doing so he got his foot severely crushed between the wheel and the step of the theatre. The brougham was so much damaged and the horses so much frightened, that she sent the coachman home with the carriage and made the footman call her a cab, which she got into, and Wilfred, observing that he was going to Piccadilly, begged her to

let him see her safe home, after she had been so nearly hurt, a favour which she did not like to refuse him.

A London four-wheeler being the noisiest conveyance in the world, they did not have much conversation on the way to Park Lane, while Wilfred's foot became more and more painful, and when they reached the door he had much difficulty in limping out to help Lady Waldermere.

"Why, you have hurt your foot!" she exclaimed; "I am so sorry I did not know it before. You must come in and see what it is."

"Thanks, very much indeed," he answered, "but I am afraid I cannot walk a step, and I think I had better go home straight in the cab. I dare say it will be all right when I get my shoe off."

"Oh, no!" she said, in an authoritative voice. "I am not going to let you leave without knowing how much you are hurt; the men will help you into the house, and I will send for a surgeon at once."

And whether he would or not, Wilfred had to take the arms of the footman and Sir Henry's own serious gentleman, who had accompanied them to Scotland, and go into the

library, while Lady Waldermere sent the footman off in the cab for her particular doctor.

Wilfred was placed in a large arm-chair near the library fire, which was always kept up when Lady Waldermere was in London, and was as much a part of the religion of the servants to feed as the flame which the vestals supported, though the penalty for its extinction was *only* Lady Waldermere's displeasure. Sir Henry's man then proceeded, with a solemnity worthy of his master, to remove the very neat shoe of the injured foot, and exposed a black silk sock with a gold clock upon it. This he peeled off, not without causing much pain, and that there was much damage done was at once most evident. Wilfred asked him to put his foot on a cushion, and cover it with a handkerchief till the doctor came, and he then did his best to pass the time in indifferent conversation with Lady Waldermere.

Sir Henry, who had been dining at the Carlton, and had encountered one or two old friends of his way of thinking there, who kept him rather late talking, turned up in the middle of the waiting for the doctor, and allowed his face to express more astonishment

at the spectacle in the library than he usually permitted himself. Lady Waldermere explained to him what had happened, and though he was extremely polite and sympathetic, there could be very little doubt that he thought the young man might very well have gone home, and had his foot dressed there. But he was the very perfection of courtesy, and there were, too, occasions upon which he knew that it was useless, as well as most injudicious, to dispute his wife's wishes.

The doctor came at last, and said that there was a small bone broken, and that Wilfred must not set his foot to the ground for quite a month, but that it would be better to put wet bandages on it, and put it straight in the morning.

Wilfred at once asked Lady Waldermere to let one of her servants go home with him, to help him in and out of the cab, but she would not hear of it, and said that the bedroom on the ground floor could be got ready for him in five minutes, and there he was to pass the night. He was in no humour to resist, so he asked that his man might be sent for with some dressing things, and said with a smile that he would try to submit with a good grace to his

captivity, but that he did not see what he had done to deserve being made a prisoner of.

“Why you saved me from being hurt, and were hurt yourself,” said Lady Waldermere, “and whether you know it or not you look now as pale as a ghost. I should be quite inhuman to turn you out in such a state.”

The room was soon ready, and before very long Wilfred's servant arrived with the elaborate bag that assisted at his toilette, and he was put to bed in the room close to the library which he so well remembered Lady Waldermere showing him on his first visit to the house, but which he never imagined then that he would ever occupy.

He was not sorry to find himself in bed, and his foot in cool wet bandages, for it really hurt him very much, and he felt exhausted. The various events of the evening had happened so quickly that it seemed impossible for him to realize them all, and that he was now actually in Lady Waldermere's own house seemed to him to be the strangest thing of all. He tried to understand it all, but at last he fell asleep, and after many extraordinary dreams, and some restlessness, he was in a sound sleep the following morning at half past ten, when

he was awoke by a visit from the doctor of the evening before, accompanied by one of the most agreeable men of London, as well as most clever of surgeons, whom Lady Walder had insisted on sending for, saying that he lived so close that he must come.

He saw in a very few minutes what was the matter, and after setting the bone and binding up the foot, he told Wilfred that he must not think of moving it for quite three weeks. He complimented Wilfred on his good quarters and upon his nurse, whom he knew very well, and whose house he had frequently dined at, and told him that it was worth smashing his foot to be in such society. Wilfred assured him that he quite appreciated the charms of his kind hostess, but thought he should be going to his own house that day. The great surgeon smiled, and said anyhow he hoped to have the pleasure of seeing him there again, and that he should call in and see how he was getting on. Lady Waldermere had received the report of Wilfred, from what she called the most agreeable man in Mayfair, and told him that as they were in town for a short time she intended to keep her patient to amuse her,

and to insure her having another visit from her delightful neighbour.

The surgeon had allowed him to put on enough things to be wheeled into the library, and Wilfred lay there on a most luxurious sofa, watching the fire of the oak logs, flickering on the old dutch tiles, and thinking what a dull month he should have in his own rooms, and waiting till Lady Waldermere came in that he might arrange about getting home.

She came in at last, and when he suggested moving, she would not hear of it, saying that he had been hurt in her service, and that she should not think of letting him go to his lonely lodgings; that Sir Henry had business which would keep them in town for another fortnight, and joined her in insisting that he should remain where he was, unless he found himself so very uncomfortable that he could not endure it.

He made a feeble resistance, but showed most plainly with what a good grace he submitted to his fate, and after she had left him he lay there in a delightful dreamy sort of state, feeling how charming it was to be cared for like this, and that for a fortnight at least he would have all the delights of home which

he had not known for so long, and, more than that, would have Lady Waldermere for his constant companion. So he shut his eyes to the future and to the outer cares of the world and resolved to enjoy his state as a poor cripple.

He had been lying for some time comfortably like this, when he heard the noise of small feet at the door, and a little tap at it.

"Come in," he called, and the door opened enough for a curly head to enter, and a little voice to say, "Mamma said we might come and ask you how you were, so we have just come for one minute."

"Is that you, my little Hilda," he said; "come in and inspect the sick man, he won't bite."

And in came little Hilda, followed by Flossy and their faithful attendant, Brebis. The children seemed delighted to see him; and Brebis, after a careful examination of him and his wounded foot, appeared to be satisfied with him, and they were all very comfortable together when Lady Waldermere came into the room again.

"I am afraid that the children worry you, Mr. St. John," she said.

"Oh, no! quite the contrary," he said. "I am only too glad of their company. You mean to nurse me, don't you, Hilda?"

"Yes, I do," she said, "and because you helped mamma from being hurt!"

"Are you very fond of mamma?" he asked.

"Yes, I *do* love her," said the child, putting her little hands together, and looking up at her mother with a look of devotion there was no mistaking, and then taking her hand and kissing it.

"It is just the same with all," he thought to himself, "friends, acquaintance, children and servants, no one can resist the spell, and I suppose I am under it, too; but where I am, there I will remain for the moment at any rate."

So the first day passed away, and after he had had dinner Sir Henry and Lady Waldermere came in to see him for a short time, but insisted on his going to bed early, where he lay for long and reflected much before sleep visited him. It all seemed so strange, he could not understand it. He was suddenly, again on the same delightful terms with Lady Waldermere as three months before, and she

quite ignored her change of manner to him, and his display of bitterness. He could not understand it, and he could make her out less than ever, but for the present there was nothing for him to make out, and he had only to take the good the gods provided, and ask no more. What did the study of Lady Waldermere's character matter to him? Perhaps he should one day understand it,—perhaps not,—but at any rate for the moment the most delightful side of it was shown to him, and that was enough for him. And with these comfortable thoughts he sank into soft repose, and wandered away through fairyland in delightful dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

"So you have a captive knight downstairs," said Mrs. Addington, with a half-malicious smile, to Lady Waldermere in her drawing-room on the following day.

"Yes," she answered, "Mr. St. John brought me home after my brougham was smashed, and I found that he had hurt his foot too much to go home, though he said nothing about it at the time."

"I dare say he is quite contented," observed Mrs. Addington.

"He is very patient and good," she answered, "but you know what a bore it is for a man to be laid up."

"He might find himself in worse quarters than under your care; my dear, if you are too good to him he will find it hard to go."

"I don't think he will find that very

difficult, it must be very dull in that room all day."

"Don't you go and cheer him up now and then?" asked Mrs. Addington.

"I and Sir Henry generally sit there after dinner, so then he has some society," she answered.

"Has Mrs. Henderson been here to ask after him yet?" said Mrs. Addington, "I should have come to see you yesterday, but Charley said so little about the accident to your carriage that I had no idea Mr. St. John had been hurt."

"No, Mrs. Henderson has not been here yet, but I should think she is very likely to drop in to-day. When do you leave London?"

"We go to-morrow," said Mrs. Addington, "and shall remain steadily at Kirthorpe as long as the weather keeps open, and I do pray that it will all the winter. I never was so well off for horses, and for a wonder I am perfectly well and strong, and feel like riding as straight as a line. I wonder you don't hunt, one forgets all one's cares and bothers, and meets such a lot of pleasant men too. But you can come and see us by-and-by, and you can bring your invalid with you if you

like," she added with a smile. "But won't you let me go down and see him, if he is visible? or perhaps you keep him in bed?"

"No, he is not in bed," said Lady Waldermere, "and will, I am sure, be charmed to see you, we talk a great deal about you."

"Do you?" she answered. "I wonder what you say of me?"

"No harm, you may be sure," said Lady Waldermere.

"Well, if you don't, you will be the first people in London who talk of me and don't say harm of me," she said, "but I don't care a scrap, and whatever my ways are, so they will continue in spite of the tongues of the world." Mrs. Addington paused for a minute, and then said, "I wonder what you really think of Mr. St. John."

"I like him very much," said Lady Waldermere, who wondered a little at Mrs. Addington's bold, and not very skilful effort to draw her out on the subject. "But I don't know that I have any special ideas about him."

"But you have seen so much of him," continued, Mrs. Addington, "and I am very much interested in him. I think him charming, and I want to know if you agree with me."

"I never think any man charming," she answered. "I think they are all so selfish *au fond*, that if you only watch them enough, and are not taken by their first efforts at pleasing you, you find it out very soon, and then all illusions about their charmingness depart."

"Oh! you, Hilda, are always going so deep into everything, you are like the children who break their toys to see what they are made of." As sure as you get a man whom you like, and who does all he can to please you, you dissect him to find out how and why he does it. I like to take them as they come, and give myself up to the charm of the moment, and I don't care if my doll is stuffed with sawdust or diamonds, as long as he is nice to play with at the moment."

"Well, I envy you your power," she replied, "but if I have not got it, I cannot assume it."

"But, tell me, Hilda," said the other lady, "do you mean you never loved a man in your life?"

"Yes, my husband," she answered, smiling.

"Oh! I don't mean your husband, of course one loves one's husband, between the intervals

when one hates him," she answered, "but before you were married, if you don't like to own to it since?"

"I don't think I ever did," Lady Waldermere answered. "I think I have too high an idea of myself, and too low a one of men to do it. Of course, one likes some better than others, but that is all I could say."

"Do you think you could love Mr. St. John, for instance?" went on Mrs. Addington.

"I have never thought about it, so I really cannot give an opinion," said Lady Waldermere, who wondered more and more at the unguardedness of Mrs. Addington.

"How tiresome you are, Hilda," she said, "here is a man you have been most intimate with for months, and now have in your own house, and I cannot get you to tell me what you think of him."

"Do you want to know if he is stuffed with sawdust or diamonds?" said Lady Waldermere. "I thought, Bessie, you did not care to know, as long as he pleased you, what the interior of your doll was made of."

"You know I don't mean what he is made of. I don't, as I said, want to know *that*,—if he pleases me or not, I know that well enough

already,—I want to know your sensations, whether you think he is a man whom you could have loved in days long ago, whom you have sympathy with ; your affinity, in fact,—that expresses it as well as any sentimental phrases.”

“But, my dear, I tell you again,” said Lady Waldermere, “that I have no feelings on the subject, and I can assure you he is not my affinity, or any thing of the sort. I like him, as I told you, very much ; he is rather clever, and very pleasant to talk to, but he has many faults, and is very far from perfection, and is, I suspect, that which I allow a woman to be by right, but which I do not suffer in a man, a flirt.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Addington, “I am afraid he is that, but he is not one of the rather stupid casual ones, who make love as if by rule, and who you know are going to do it, and just what they are going to say ; he says all he does say so pleasantly, he is never coarse, like too many men are. And though I know I am often too free and easy, and that Charley has broken me in to a good deal, I still don’t like it ; and there is to me something so sympathetic about Mr. St. John,—I believe that is the chief charm in him,” she added, as though musing about him.

“ Well, he seems to have got some way in your good graces, at any rate,” said Lady Waldermere, “ but why don’t you ask Alice Henderson what she thinks about him ? I am sure she knows him well enough, and I fancy likes him a wee bit.”

“ What’s the use of asking her ? ” said Mrs. Addington, “ why, she told me of her own accord, the other day, a long story about him, the text of it all was his devotion to her, and that she could not make up her mind how much she liked him. She really said that it only wanted the least encouragement on her part, to make him propose, and that it was at times quite painful to keep him at a distance. She is beyond everything such a lump of sentimental affectation ; what does she think every man can see in her to fall so desperately in love with ? I pumped Mr. St. John the other day, and told him it was a great shame his making such a fool of Alice, and tried to see what he would say, but he was, I must own, very loyal, and I could get very little out of him ; he would not say how much he liked her, though I knew he cannot help laughing at her, and he said he did not think her soft heart would suffer much on his account, and

that Frank Digby and one or two others had more claim to its sympathy than he had. But I wonder *you* don't care more for him! I think he is charming, and Charley has had one good fit of jealousy about him already, but it has gone off enough for him to be let come down to stay with us this winter."

"Then, dear, I hope you will find him more charming than ever," said Lady Waldermere, "and I don't think in the meantime that I am likely to spoil him for your lively society. I will get him well as fast as I can, and you and Alice can squabble for him then."

"I am not going to squabble for any man," she answered, "if he likes to come and see me he can, but if he chooses to stay away, I shan't break my heart,—there are still as good fish ready to rise to the fly as him, and I am not old or ugly yet. But let's go down and see him."

They went down and found Wilfred with the two small Waldermeres by his sofa listening to stories he was telling them. Flossy had seated herself on a low chair close to the sofa, and little Hilda had nestled close up to him with her head on his shoulder, while Brebis was listening as though she understood every word.

"What a family picture!" exclaimed Mrs. Addington. "I see you are a domesticated animal, Mr. St. John. I have come to ask after your health, and how Hilda is treating you."

"Very kind of you, Mrs. Addington," he answered. "I am treated in a way that a man does not deserve for being clumsy enough to put his foot under the wheel of a carriage."

"All London is ringing with your gallantry," she went on; "they say that it was a frightful smash, and that you saved Hilda's life at the risk of your own, and now she is nursing you most charmingly. I saw Sir Percy Fitzroy this morning, and he told me that several men he had met had told him the whole story, without letting it lose in the telling."

"Very kind of the world to take so much interest in my doings," said Wilfred, who knew that Mrs. Addington was amusing herself by trying to draw him out before Lady Waldermere.

Mrs. Addington stayed some little time longer rattling on, and losing no chance of chaffing the pair on the whole business, and about Wilfred being shut up in Lady Waldermere's house, and she said quite enough for Wilfred to see that she was not at all pleased

to see him falling so much under the sway of her fair friend, till he thought to himself, there are squalls to be looked out for ahead, but, *vogue la galère !* he was comfortable where he was, and quite content to take the good the gods provided, without thinking of the wrath or jealousy of Mrs. Addington in the days to come. He promised to come down to Kirthorpe later on, when he was sound enough to get on a horse, and if his foot were well enough to go to the Northamptonshire balls, he would attend them. At last she departed after talking away in a most off-hand manner that evidently inclined to be sarcastic, and to try to say something a little unpleasant.

Later in the afternoon, Sir Percy called. He was a long time in the drawing-room talking to Lady Waldermere, but he did not come in to see Wilfred, saying he was in a hurry, which the latter was rather surprised at, as he thought he was sure to look in, if only to show that he had no ill-feeling with him for being actually domiciled in the house with the rose of beauty. But the fact was that Sir Percy was put out, he did not approve of any man being in such constant and intimate communication with Lady Wal-

dermere, and was out of temper ; and if he had looked in on Wilfred, he was afraid he should show it a little, which was a thing he would not do for all the world. He had tried to prevent Lady Waldermere's seeing what was in his mind, but clever as he was, she was cleverer, and a woman into the bargain ; he overdid his part too, rather, and referred to Wilfred St. John, and the accident which caused his presence in the house, with too studied an indifference of manner, which she could not help being amused to see so old a campaigner as Sir Percy display. He was evidently piqued at her indifference to him, and was fast approaching the state of the man she had described so graphically to her two friends at Glen Dhu. Sir Percy was really quite upset in all his calculations about women by her. He had imagined that she must be at least flattered by the so evidently marked preference of a man who held so high a position in the world of fashion, and for whose favours so many fair women had scrambled, and now here was one certainly more charming than any of them, but still a woman, who did not seem to care if he came or went, if he talked to her or not, and who showed no sign of

caring one straw if he made desperate love to another woman under her very nose. The provoking part was that if he showed signs of going away, she made not the slightest effort to keep him, or recall him, and all his old ideas of the way women were to be worked upon were quite useless. Whether she had no feelings, or was so proud that she set herself far above the weaknesses of other women, he could not make out; but, on the other hand, he had so often seen her in her moments of careless gaiety, when she seemed the most thorough woman possible, and only too conscious of the charm she could exercise over all who came near her, as well as delighted with the pleasant companionship of some one very agreeable. He had come there that afternoon with some undefined idea about how he was going to make a sarcastic remark or two about Wilfred St. John, and put some little stone in his way, and at the same time make Lady Waldermere see that it was rather a strong measure for so pretty a woman as her, to take so gay an invalid into her house. The one effort, however, which he made to say something fell so flat, and she showed such a calm superiority to any regard of what he

or anybody else might think, and without saying anything, quietly implied that she was so far above any idea that what she chose to do could be for one moment compromising, that he had to give in at once, and he felt to his annoyance that he left the house admiring her more than ever; and instead of gaining any advantage, that he had been very near putting himself in a ridiculous light, even if he had not in a small measure quite done so.

• Mrs. Henderson called later in the day, and in her real kindness of heart, and gushing sympathy with Wilfred's misfortune, there was no trace whatever of any feeling except that of kindness. She was too simple, and too innocently confident of her own charms, to feel jealousy. She was one of those happy women into whose head the idea of any other woman interfering with her admirers never entered. It would have been hardly fair to say she was conceited; her blissful unconsciousness of her own simplicity, made it impossible for her to be called that, and it was more the confidence of a mind that cannot see that any other minds differ from hers, or can feel in any other way, which saved her from those feelings which prompted Mrs. Addington to

say smart things about the dwellers in Park Lane. She was going to stay in London a little longer, and promised to come in again and cheer him up. She was quite genuine when she said she wished it had fallen to her lot to take care of the sick man, but that he was in the best of hands, and departed as kindly and pleasantly as she had come.

Sir Henry's business went steadily on, and he was very well pleased to stay in London, though it would have been hard for him to say why he could not leave that very business in the hands of his agent and lawyer, which he really only fidgeted himself with for something to do. He found he was not at all put out by Wilfred's being in the house, and had become quite reconciled by finding that he was satisfactory to talk politics to, which he did in the rather pompous manner of a half-country gentleman, half man of the world style of politician. Wilfred on his side got on well enough with him. He thanked the gods that he did not have to spend his life with him, but he could not say he was ever disagreeable, only hopelessly uninteresting. He was a kind-hearted man, and never would have been selfish intentionally, always con-

sidering himself very much the contrary, but having had his own way so thoroughly all his life, had made it seem impossible for him to alter his ways for any one, and he felt it was every one's business naturally to conform to his wishes, as his wishes must be right. His wife got her own way sometimes by always humouring him in small matters, and very often by persuading him when she did what she wanted, that it was only because he wished her to do it.

In the evenings Sir Henry used generally to talk for a little, and then read and go to sleep, so that Wilfred and Lady Waldermere had a long time to talk over all sorts of subjects, and to become more and more intimate.

So a delightful week passed away for Wilfred. His home had been broken up so long, and his life had been so wandering for several years, that he did not know what the feeling of a quiet pleasant household round him was. The position he was in was so different from that of a visitor, that he felt as though he belonged to the family, and they quite treated him as though he did. The children were devoted to him, and used to spend hours in his room, and Brebis had taken to him as

though she had known him all her life. He had quite given up thinking about his position and feelings towards Lady Waldermere; he found himself with her every day, and he could not very well get away if he wanted to, so he left himself and the affairs of life to drift along, and shut his eyes to the future. How hard it would be to go back to the cold every-day routine of his solitary life! how delightful life must be with such a companion! were thoughts that would ever and again intrude themselves upon him, but what was the use of indulging in them? and he used, when tired of reading, and the children had left him, to lie among the cushions of his sofa, and indulge in long dreams of a life that never could be his. Dangerous dreams, but too pleasant to be put away; his foot would be well all too soon, and then he must wander away; the poor wounded creature that had been taken in and nursed would have to go out into the rough world again, and feel a kindly gratitude to those who had cared for it; but in spite of recovered health and freedom, a regret at leaving the shelter where it had been so gently treated, would be the strongest feeling.

So time passed on. The Waldermeres lingered on in London till Sir Henry began to get impatient, and Wilfred was really better, and there was no excuse for prolonging a life that was delightful to him, and seemed to be pleasant to Lady Waldermere. Wilfred was too diffident of his own powers of pleasing to think he would ever be more than a pleasant but ordinary sort of friend of Lady Waldermere, and had too much good feeling in himself, as well as too much respect for her, ever to let his language or manner approach the ground of what was called in days gone by the name of gallantry, but which under various names is only too often practised in our own days, while she showed herself quite able to appreciate the delicacy of his manner towards her. She had now quite left off her fits of cynicism, but he was sure that her real character was most sensitive, and that she was possessed of unusually deep powers of feeling, though even now, well as he knew her, whenever they approached any ground in which there might be opportunity for an expression of strong and serious feeling, she managed always to turn it off, generally with some little joke or laugh; and he never could lead

her into any real expression of opinion on a subject above the common range of society, and every-day life. They read several of the same books, French and English, and used to discuss them afterwards, and he often found that the range and variety of her reading was considerably beyond his own. He had in his life known clever intellectual women, and pretty agreeable women, but the former had seldom any real feminine fascination about them, and the latter were apt to be so taken up with their charms, that their conversation, to honour it by such a name, was too often silly. Here was one who had all the power of fascination of beauty and intellect in the highest degree, and he saw how it was felt by all who had to do with her. By her children first who adored her, by all her household who never left her service if they could help it, and to whom from the highest to the lowest it was a pleasure to do anything for her. In society, too, she seemed to have just the same power over all who came near her, and he was more astonished than ever to see the number of women who really liked her; and who could look on so pretty and popular a woman without jealousy. But on knowing her more intimately,

by far her greatest charm was in herself, in her delightful power of conversation, her ready wit, and the store of miscellaneous information she seemed to have to draw on, without ever making the least display of it, and to such degree did she carry her absence of showing off her knowledge, that often some not overwise man left her, delighted at finding a woman who, as he thought, really appreciated his attainments, and had sense enough to see what he was worth, and acknowledge his superiority over her, which he had found that so many women had not wits enough to do, the generality being too stupid to understand him. But here was a woman with every charm of beauty, and at the same time with sense enough to know what his powers were worth; such a man fully feeling that there is nothing which a stupid man dislikes more, or which a clever man more appreciates, than a woman cleverer than himself. But whether intentionally or naturally Lady Waldermere had a way of never letting her inferiors feel her superiority, while with her equals she let it be long before they discovered the depth that was in her. Her husband, for one, had never fathomed it,—he, in his way, felt the

charm of her presence, and was able to admire her beauty,—as he could not help doing, for, in fact, it was for that that he had married her,—but he considered that she was a woman who had her vagaries, who was sometimes tolerably sensible, and then wandered away into strange fancies, yet he thought that this was to be expected in a woman. As for her reading and powers of mind, he ignored them altogether, being quite of the school of men who say, “A clever woman, sir! what does a woman want with cleverness? her place is in her own house, to look after her children and her household! let her keep them in order, and stay among them! that’s what a woman’s cleverness ought to be! as for your women who must be showing off before the world, I have no patience with them, their duty is to their husband, sir! to their husband!”

He, in his heart, like many others, thought a woman should be little better than a household drudge. What business has she with likes and dislikes? it is her duty to love her husband, to take care of her children, to have twenty if it so pleases Providence, as he chooses to call whatever power arranges the number of a woman’s family. With him and

those who think like him, it is all give and no take; he would be considerate if it suited him, but only then, and in his heart he thought the sack and the bowstring were the real method of managing a woman. Love to him was very little removed from sensuality, and he thought that a woman as the inferior animal must go about in the world only to serve his ends in society, and to marry off her daughters, if she had any; all social intercourse to please herself was a useless interference with her duties, and in theory should be interdicted, but modern custom has unfortunately given women so much liberty, so that it was useless struggling to keep her in beyond a certain limit.

Lady Waldermere thoroughly knew and understood her husband's views, and had the wisdom never to combat them; he was not really as hard in practice as in theory, and she in the end had quite as much of the society of her friends as she wished, and more liberty than many of her acquaintances. Her children she was by nature most fond of, and they were really her first care in life, but her husband was no companion to her in any sense, and never could be.

The time at last came when they must go

down into the country, and Wilfred must leave his quiet home in Park Lane. When little Hilda heard he was going the next day, she was in despair.

“ Oh ! mamma ! ” she said, “ don’t you like him any more ? won’t you take him down with us into the country ? I thought he was going always to stay with us. He always tells me stories when I want, and he has taught Brebis to walk all round the room on her hind legs, and to lie dead, and to say she loves you.”

“ How does she say that, Hilda ? ” asked her mother.

“ Oh ! I’ll show you in a minute, come here Brebis at once,” and Brebis was produced immediately. “ Now sit up like a good black sheep and say whom you love. Is it me ? ” no answer. “ Is it Mr. St. John ? ” no answer. Is it Lady Waldermere ? ” and Brebis opened her mouth and gave two barks prolonged to a howl, and then walked away wagging her stumpy tail with the velocity that only a poodle is capable of.

“ An animal of great discernment, you see, Lady Waldermere,” said Wilfred. “ Hilda, will you let Brebis come and live with me and tell me whom she loves ? ”

“Oh ! Brebis, will never leave me,” she cried, throwing her little arms round the woolly creature, “but you don’t want her to tell you whom she loves—you know it, and you love her too ; he told me he did, mamma, for I asked him !”

Wilfred looked rather sheepish ; for, whether he did or not, it was embarrassing for the child to bring it out like that. And little Hilda kept on by saying that she had said one day, “I do love mamma so, don’t you love her too, Mr. St. John ? and he said he did ! mamma, he really did, and I am sure he does too !”

“He learnt to repeat it from you, my dear,” said Lady Waldermere, “just like Brebis has learnt it. Happy childhood,” she added, turning to Wilfred, “when we believe everything we hear. What a pity we cannot live in the same blissful credulity all our lives !”

“Do you mean,” he said, “that you don’t believe in love at all ? You do believe that Hilda loves you, at least, and I believe that every one in this house does too in their humble way, according to their different positions, and I am sure you will not be angry if I admit myself to the honour of sharing in a feeling that is possessed by all who know you well.”

He looked up at Lady Waldermere as he said this with so tender and affectionate a look that she made no answer, and walked across to the fireplace and was silent for a minute. Then she changed the subject and began to talk of other matters.

Little Hilda was disconsolate at losing him, but was somewhat consoled when her mother told her she might ask him if he would come and see them in Warwickshire, which it is needless to say he promised to do. Then she enumerated all the treasures he was to see, the old donkey, the very tame cow, her large new foundland, besides other interesting animals of the human and other species, for Hilda's hear seemed to be large and could contain a whole menagerie, and half the village.

That evening as they were sitting in the library after dinner, and Wilfred was expressing his feeling of the great kindness of Sir Henry and Lady Waldermere, Sir Henry became quite gushing, and said that he was really sorry to part with him, that he had made the house quite cheerful and pleasant, and expressed himself with a warmth quite unusual in him. Lady Waldermere did not say much she seemed at one time a little inclined to

*be melancholy, at least so Wilfred thought, but she brightened up, and was her old cheerful self, laughing over the game of *écarté* she played with him with that light careless gaiety of hers that had at certain times almost made him think that it was all she had in her.*

That night Wilfred's dreams were sad and troubled, and many an hour did he lie awake, lamenting the flight of time, and vaguely trying to speculate on the future; but one thing he steadily resisted the effort to do, which was to define his feelings towards Lady Waldermere,—he was completely under the charm, he felt that, and that was enough for the present. The shadowy future must take care of itself!

CHAPTER X.

THE winter passed, and Wilfred St. John had quite recovered. He had been to stay with the Addingtons, at Kirthorpe, where he had more than one gallop over the glorious Northamptonshire pastures, and found Mrs. Addington in her glory. She was one of the few women who do show to advantage in the hunting-field, always looking pretty and neat, never coming to pieces at the end of the hardest or longest run, and never in the way. Wilfred, like many other men, had very great doubts if the hunting-field was a place for ladies at all, but he could not help feeling that there were exceptions when he saw how Mrs. Addington looked there, and how beautifully she rode, and then she was so cheery and pleasant to talk to going to the meet and home again ; and during the long chilly wait-

at the covert-side it was so nice to have a bright pretty woman always ready to talk, and always amusing.

She seemed to receive him with extra favour, and to be determined that he should find everything at Kirthorpe charming, herself included. She talked to him a little of Lady Waldermere, but not very much, only casually alluding to his sojourn in Park Lane, and evidently was resolved that, whether she felt it or not, she was not going to show any sign of considering that he had swerved in his allegiance to her, or to do or say anything that could for one moment show any signs of jealousy towards that lady. Wilfred was rather relieved when he found that she had adopted this line, as he had been a little afraid that he would have had to undergo a considerable amount of gentle chaff, and some pretty smart things from Mrs. Addington's tongue, which could be bitter enough when she chose. As for himself he found that he very easily dropped back into the old pleasant familiar intercourse with her which had grown up at Folkestone, and the decided preference for him which she did not hesitate to show was by no means disagreeable. He had

spent so many years of his life flitting from flower to flower, that there was nothing unnatural to him in for the moment ignoring everything outside, and devoting himself to the pretty and agreeable woman who was so ready to accept his little cares and attentions. He thought often and much of Lady Waldermere, but she was so utterly different to Mrs. Addington,—there was so very little in common between the two ladies,—that he could not compare them. The strong and affectionate friendship that he felt for Lady Waldermere seemed to him a thing so much apart from his flirtations with Mrs. Addington, or any one else, that the two seemed quite compatible with each other; and there seemed no breach of loyalty in what is called in the slang of the day, “carrying on,” with Mrs. Addington, when Lady Waldermere was not there. He had for so long followed the course that his inclination had prompted him to, and had always done as a matter of course just what seemed pleasant at the moment, with so very little regard to consequences, that he would have been very much startled if any one had told him that his conduct was anything but justifiable. His own feelings were

always so little engaged when he made himself pleasant to any fair lady, whether married or single, that he never for a minute thought what hers might be, or of the consequences that his attentions to her, or her preference for him, might entail on her. He was not heartless or unkind in the least, and would have been the first to blame himself if he thought he had caused a moment's discomfort to anyone, but this careless habit of amusing himself by being as pleasant as he could to one agreeable woman after another, and then almost forgetting her existence, had sadly demoralized him. He would have told any one who blamed him that he really liked the lady of the moment, and that he only let her see it, as was fair, but that she was in no more danger of feeling any mischief from it, or of being in any way compromised, than he was.

So it was now with him and Mrs. Addington. It would have been impossible to deny that there was a pretty hot flirtation going on between the two. Wilfred, on his side, was never likely to have one night's rest disturbed by any thoughts of the charms of Mrs. Addington, and she was too old a flirt to be much injured by the game which she was

playing ; but besides amusing herself, she felt a sensation of satisfaction and triumph at detaching him from Lady Waldermere. To take him from Mrs. Henderson was very poor sport. In the first place she never believed that he cared one atom for that good-natured and sentimental lady ; and she, too, was much too slow in perception to discover whether a man was more or less her slave than before, if he only talked to her, when with her, in the old strain, so that to take him from her was no fun, but to gain a victory over Lady Waldermere was quite another thing. She had begun at the end of the summer to consider that Wilfred was her property, and she was not much pleased in her heart at the way he had devoted himself to Lady Waldermere up in Scotland, but as that had cooled down when the party at Glen Dhu became more numerous, and as he had left there on the best of terms with her, and had parted apparently rather coldly from her friend, she had not thought much more of it ; but the accident to his foot, and the long period he had resided under her care in Park Lane, was quite another thing. It was all very well to say that he had hurt himself in her service,

and that common gratitude made Lady Waldermere extend her hospitality and care to him, but she did not for one minute believe that if he had been some casual uninteresting acquaintance, who was a little hurt in doing something for her, she would have taken him for ages into her house in that way. She had been piqued too by the ill-success of her effort to get any opinion of Wilfred from Lady Waldermere, and she had very strong suspicions that that very correct and cautious lady cared much more about the wanderer than she would have liked any one to guess. This feeling, and the desire to pay her out for poaching on her preserves, together with a real liking for the person in question, made her take pains to be extremely pleasant to him, and so things went on. As for her husband, he was used to her little ways. They had had one or two grand flare-ups in days gone by, and he, when annoyed, would say what he thought pretty plainly, but he did not care much in this instance what she did; he felt that if it was not Wilfred who was first favourite, it might be some one whom he disliked and whom he was sure to have unpleasant scenes with his wife about, so he

left them alone, contenting himself with an occasional sarcastic observation, which he used to bring out without regard to time and season.

So they went on till he had protracted his visit to the utmost length possible, and had renewed the old sort of semi-sentimental alliance with her. Before he left she had hazarded a remark or two about Lady Waldermere to him, but he took them very coldly, and did not rise at all, so that she felt it wiser to leave things alone, contenting herself with giving her a little dig or two, which ladies know so well how to give to their dearest friends when they are a bit jealous of them, so delicately managed that he could say nothing for her, but calculated to set him thinking whether Lady Waldermere was the very correct lady in past days that he had imagined. The seeds of a doubt or two on the subject were most judiciously sown, and Mrs. Addington trusted to time and chance helping to make them bear a little fruit later on.

Wilfred left Kirthorpe and wandered back to London, not exactly knowing what to do with himself, when he got a short letter from Lady Waldermere asking him, if he had nothing better to do, to come down to see

them in Warwickshire for a few days. His first feeling on reading the letter was one of great pleasure at the thought of seeing her again, and of once more living that pleasant life which he had enjoyed so much between her and her children in Park Lane. Then he reflected on the past, and on what the future might be, and ever and again the thought would force itself upon him, of what his real feelings were toward that fascinating lady, ~~but~~ he again refused to analyse them, rather dreading the result. This feeling was followed by an unpleasant recollection of the hints that Mrs. Addington threw out about Lady Waldermere's past. It never occurred to him that there might be no ground for her suggested calumnies, for he did not perceive that she could have any object in saying a word about Lady Waldermere that was not true. She had certainly said nothing precise, but had apparently accidentally led him to infer that there were passages in Lady Waldermere's past life which she would not care to have raked up again, and that the appearance of having been always so indifferent to the admiration she had received, was not quite justified by circumstances. Lady Waldermere was certainly

clever enough to deceive any one, and she was only a woman and a mortal, and, after all, what was more possible than that she might have before then come across some man who was more agreeable than all the others. He remembered his old doubts about her, his old difficulty in realising her character, and he felt very uncomfortable. The pain that these thoughts gave him told him only too plainly the deep interest he took in her, and what his bitter disappointment would be if his ideas were to be brought down one little bit from the pedestal on which he had placed her. At one time he said to himself that it was impossible, that she was perfection,—at another, that she was every bit a woman, and one that could charm any man she took a fancy to, and why might she not ere this have taken that fancy? He let one day pass before he answered her letter, and wandered about, at one minute resolved to go down to see her, and somehow fathom all her life; at another, determining to go off abroad again, far away, and put himself out of the reach of any of these worrying thoughts and ideas. But human nature was too strong, and he had made up his mind before he laid his head on

his pillow to sleep, that he would go down to see her, and show her how he could be her intimate friend without any fear of falling too far under the power of her charm. The thought of Sir Percy crossed his mind more than once, and he could not bear to resign the field altogether to that agreeable and not over scrupulous baronet. The result was, as was of course inevitable, that he wrote a warm letter accepting her invitation, and that he felt very impatient for the moment to come for his journey down there.

The time came at last, and Wilfred found himself driving in the dusk of a February evening through the beeches, elms, and oaks, of Waldermere Park. The country round was sufficiently hilly to be picturesque, and so beautifully wooded that even in that most cheerless of seasons it looked almost pretty, and gave abundant promise of what it would be in summer, in all the glories of the rich foliage of the midland counties. The house was well placed, looking over a large part of the park and commanding a fine view of the neighbouring country. There was a good-sized herd of deer near the house, and farther away some small rough cattle were feed-

ing, both of which looked thoroughly in their place wandering through the long avenues.

The house was as old as the Tudors, but with all the advantages of old thick walls, the charm of deep windows, wide fireplaces, and dark wainscots, united with the modern luxuries of hot air and plate-glass windows, put in judiciously enough not to destroy the character of the place. Sir Henry liked warmth and comfort, and though he lived but little at Waldermere before he married, he had done everything that was possible to make the place comfortable, and in the last few years what he had done before was supplemented by the perfect taste of his wife.

Wilfred came through the outer porch, which was shut off from the house by glass doors and a great curtain, into a charming old hall with dark oak panelling, from which looked down various grim ancestors of the Waldermere family from among pieces of armour they were supposed to have worn, and old useless-looking guns and swords. Opposite the door was an immense fireplace, so deep that there was room to sit in the chimney corners on both sides of a huge log fire, and at one end of the hall was a wide staircase of

black oak. The whole was prettily lighted by old-fashioned brass clusters on the walls, in which wax candles were burning. The floor of polished oak was covered with great soft skins, and there was an immense sofa in front of the fire with several comfortable chairs, and a large table, the profusion of books, papers, and odds and ends on which showed that the hall was really used to live in. The whole was as perfect a picture of comfortable luxury and good taste as it was possible to imaginé.

As Wilfred came into the hall he was greeted by the irrepressible barking of his friend Brebis, who, however, recognised him almost immediately, and vied with the small Hilda in the demonstrations of their welcome to him. She seized upon him, dragged him into the soft recesses of the great sofa, and overwhelmed him with kisses, amid which Brebis insisted on pushing her black cold nose from time to time to claim her share.

“Mamma said I might wait here, and tell you how glad we are to see you at home,” she said. “I have so wanted you to come, but it is too late for you to see any one to-night but your old friend Brebis; ain’t you glad to see dear Brebis again? She still knows how to

lie dead, but she doesn't love mamma as well as she did, and is very lazy about walking; you will take her to school again, won't you?"

"We'll soon brush up Brebis' education again," he answered, "but is there nothing else to teach?"

"Oh! never mind the others, they are too big, the donkey can't walk on his hind legs, and Julius is too large."

"Who is Julius?" he asked.

"Julius Cæsar! why, my and Flossy's big Newfoundland, who fetches sticks out of the water."

"But where is Flossy, and how is she?" he asked.

"She is very well," she answered, "but she is upstairs; she said she would not interrupt me with you, that you were my young man, and it was fair I should receive you without her."

"And who is Flossy's young man?" he asked.

"Well, it's a secret, but I'll tell *you*," answered little Hilda; "she's in love with Sir Percy Fitzroy, and he gave her a wedding ring which she wears, and it's got an inscription on it."

“And where’s mamma?” he asked.

“Changing her dress, she came in late, but she will be down in a minute to tea.”

They had not been much longer talking on the sofa before he saw Lady Waldermere herself coming down the broad flight of steps. The tiniest little feet in little brown silk slippers, with forget-me-nots embroidered on them, peeped out, as she came downstairs, from beneath the skirt of a pretty light blue silk peignoir which made her figure look younger and sligher than ever, and her masses of light brown hair were coiled tightly round her graceful head showing its smallness and symmetry, which the tower of hair prescribed by fashion entirely concealed.

Wilfred jumped up to meet her, and as he took her little hand in his, all doubts and misgivings of her past, present, and future vanished from his mind, the pleasure of once more seeing her was enough, and he felt more than ever the intoxicating charm of her presence.

“I am afraid you will find it very dull here, Mr. St. John,” she said, “we shall have no guests for two days, as those who were coming have put us off; but I did not write to tell you,

as I thought the quiet of a day or two, though you might find it stupid, would be good for you, and much better than late hours and a hot card-room."

"You knew I should never find it dull," he answered. "Do you think I found Park Lane dull? and now I have two sound legs to wander all over your delightful park with. What a dear old place it looks, and how charming it must be in summer!"

"It is a dear old place," she answered, "even at this time of year, but you must come down and see it in the summer; then it is really beautiful, and though some people choose to call Warwickshire dull and monotonous in its scenery, you would find the view from the house most charming."

"To match the view inside, Lady Waldermere?" he said looking at her with a look of undisguised admiration.

"The hereditary beauty of Sir Henry's ancestors do you mean?" she replied, smiling.

"Hardly," he answered; "beauty will, I think, be a future and not a past possession of the Waldermere family; but really don't you think that to judge from most family portraits, one would imagine that men had always

married into one family ? there is such a remarkable family likeness between all the wives."

"Yes," she said, "and the dress seems the only thing to tell them apart by."

"How should you like to appear in that Queen Elizabeth get-up, Lady Waldermere ?" he said.

"I should object very much to that style of waist," she answered ; "they talk of women squeezing themselves in now, but what must they have done then ? I should have the bad taste to prefer the Charles the Second dress ; how comfortable that lady looks up there, a trifle *décolletée* perhaps, but she looks so soft and kitteny compared to those other grim ladies ; and though perhaps their morals were not all one could wish, they must have had some great fun after the dismal reign of the Puritans."

"I don't think we have much to complain of now," he said, "and we have one advantage over them in uniting town and country life ; theirs was all one or the other, and what can be more delightful than to come down and see you like this ? In those days you would have lived all in London and been very gay,

and never had any rest, or all in the country and have been desperately dull."

"In those days," she answered, "I should have lived and died in the sunny south, and never have seen the foggy climate of England. Where my mother settled, there I should have stayed, I suppose."

"And have married an Italian grandee, most probably," said Wilfred. "How should you have liked to marry a foreigner?"

"I am, as I said once before to you," she answered, "so cosmopolitan that I should have got on very well, I think, married to a foreigner. I should never have known what English life was like, so I should never have felt any contrast, and human nature is not so very different. It is true the small things in life and manners of Englishmen are different to those of either French or Italians, but in the greater things there is not so much difference between one polished and well-educated gentleman and another."

"But," said Wilfred, "you must grant that Englishmen are much more what is called domestic than any other nation, except, perhaps, some of the North Germans, and in that respect they are better husbands."

“Now,” she answered, “you are coming to another question, what a good husband is, and I don’t think it by any means follows that the best husband is necessarily close to his wife’s elbow perpetually. Husband and wife have each their duty in the world, and their duty, according to my view, often must lead them in directions in which it is neither useful nor pleasant for the other to follow them. And I think, too, that however fond husband and wife may be of each other, they may see enough of one another to become mutually tiresome. You, Mr. St. John,—forgive me for saying so,—view the relations of husband and wife from an extremely English point of view, and both English men and women, as you know, are very slow to see that anything, which is foreign and different from their ways, can possibly be as good, let alone better than theirs. You, I see, though a wanderer and willing to view many things liberally enough, are intensely English in your view of the matrimonial relations. I, as you know, am half American, and the rest foreign, or continental if you like. Now, American men in a town are more like the men on the Continent, in the way they live very much of their lives

out of their homes, but I don't think it necessarily makes them worse husbands, or need diminish the love between them and their wives."

"I may be prejudiced," he answered, "but I still have strong opinions on the subject, and I am satisfied in my own mind that the moral principle of an Englishman as a husband, is nearly always higher than that of a Frenchman or an Italian. I don't think it need depend on the difference between his being English, and the other a foreigner, but in some way it has arisen, and I think the very question of domesticity, we will call it, though it sounds rather an absurd term, has much to do with it. To an Englishman who is married, his house is, in most cases, his home, and if a happy one, the place where he wishes to be most; and in my ideal *ménage*, the society of his wife is the most delightful the world can afford to the husband. Now, as far as I can understand, the home of most married men of France and Italy, and it seems to me too, of many Americans, is the town they live in, and their house is merely a necessary head-quarters, and their wife a necessary appendage as much as a pleasure. You see, Lady Waldermere, I have never

married, and perhaps for that reason,—as the unknown is always supposed to be something exaggerated,—I idealize the married state too much. I judge of it from the rare instances that I have come across, in which I have seen husband and wife as happy together as it has seemed possible for two human beings to be, and I should, if I were to marry, aspire to that happiness; and though I have no doubt that there have been numbers of most happy marriages on the Continent, the English idea of the great companionship of man and wife, and the intensely close communion between them, appears to me to afford the best conditions for the perfection of that happiness. If a man's whole idea at starting in married life is that his highest happiness is to be found at home, I think he is much more likely to find it there, than if he never imagines his life will be different from what it was as a bachelor, except in having a larger house and establishment than before, and having a wife at the head of it instead of—well, we won't go into what so many men on the Continent think a necessity, unfortunately too frequently after marriage as well as before."

"I see, Mr. St. John," she answered, "that

you are arriving at the highest ideal in your views ; now, that can fall to so few that I think it almost as well to allow for the chances of the average husband and wife, and to see whether they cannot trot along just smoothly under the conditions of married life, that are not so very English, for under these foreign arrangements the wife is not in danger of seeing too much of a fidgety or disagreeable husband as she is here ; and though one or two may miss the beautiful ideal state you dream of, I am half inclined to think that rather more get a state of fair comfort in life."

"You see, Lady Waldermere," he replied, "you speak from experience, and I from imagination ; when I have tried a wife, I will tell you whether the light of English domesticity answers my expectation. You can tell me your experience."

"I don't speak from any experience," she answered quickly, "I am only talking of general theories ; but if you want experience, why not ask our friend Bessie Addington what she thinks of domesticity ? By the way," she went on, changing the subject, "what is the latest news of that lady, and how did you amuse yourself at Kirthorpe ?"

Wilfred then went on to talk of the Addingtons, and all they did when he was staying there. It seemed rather curious that before he had been ten minutes in the house, he and Lady Waldermere should be having one of their discussions on abstract subjects, before they even thought about the doings and shortcomings of their most intimate friends, but it was very natural, and it was like taking up the thread of their life exactly where they had dropped it, when they parted in Park Lane.

Tea was brought in, and little Flossy made her appearance, and then Sir Henry, who was quite cordial in his greeting. He stood with his back to the fire, in a stiff neckcloth, and with nothing about him of the easiness of dress which most men of the present day at any age enjoy, but he looked quite the monarch of all he surveyed. His children seemed fond of him, but a little afraid, and the contrast of their manner to him and to their mother was as great as was the contrast between them. Wilfred had been used in Park Lane to see a great deal of the family in this very private way, and had been unable to help contrasting the stiff and formal mind, as well as body of Sir Henry, with the great softness and adapta-

bility of his wife, and this contrast struck him especially strongly after the conversation they had just had. He had often made little efforts to get Lady Waldermere to drop some hint of what she thought of her husband, and of what her real feelings were towards him, but he had never induced her to say one word on the subject, though from what actual motives he could not say. He had studied them in their own house in London, and now saw them as privately in their house in the country, and his interest in the family became greater and greater, more particularly after the ideas that Mrs. Addington had put into his mind. Any definite ideas he had not, but what she said had created a feeling of something akin to distrust, and he longed to know Lady Waldermere intimately enough to feel that there was nothing in the past of the friend he valued and admired so much, which could for one minute mar the picture he carried in his imagination.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day little Hilda took him round to see all her various friends, animals and human. Julius, who was most demonstrative, the donkey, on which he had to get, and the favourite cow, who came for bread or other consideration as soon as the small child was in sight. Then he had to visit her old friends, men and women, ancient retainers, who fully returned little Hilda's affection, and who seemed to worship, not only the sweetness of her mother, but to feel almost as much as he did the charm of her beauty, and they spoke of her as of a superior being come from another world. He was much struck with the likeness of character between the mother and daughter; this little creature with all that charm of manner already, 'and every promise of the same sort of beauty, the sweetness of which

was as much its great feature, as its brilliancy. The morning was so bright that Lady Waldermere sent out to him to propose to take him a drive, and he was very soon seated by her in a pony phaeton worthy if possible of the fair driver.

"I see," he said, "that if you don't hunt, Lady Waldermere, you can drive; you hold the reins as though you were driving live animals, and not a machine as so many people do. . It always amuses me so to see many of the ladies who drive about London, sitting generally very upright, and holding the reins with their arms quite straight out, and often one in each hand. There seems to be with women in riding and in driving very little mediocrity; they either do it very well indeed, or not at all well."

"Don't be hard on us, Mr. St. John," said Lady Waldermere, "you forget the riding and driving do not come into our regular sphere as they do into men's. There is plenty of mediocrity among women in the things they all do, such as music, drawing, etc. Now with men, if they do those things at all, they generally do them very well, or, as you put it, not at all well; but I cannot tell you why, and I don't think

that I have any necessity for going into the first causes of anything."

"How do you like life down here?" he asked presently, after a pause, "Do you find you take much interest in the poor people about? I don't ask after the country neighbours; I know what they are generally like; but I mean do you like doing the lady bountiful?"

"I like seeing every one round me happy and comfortable," she answered; "but I must confess that individually I don't care about them."

"But those I saw this morning—I mean little Hilda's retainers—all seemed devoted to you," he said.

"It is very kind of them," she answered; "and this devotion is purchased very cheaply, and I am afraid not much returned. I was not made for visiting about cottages. I cannot take an interest in their rheumatics and complaints, and I by no means share the feelings of a philanthropic lady who, I am told, arrived at the pitch of saying that she liked the smell of the people, meaning the unwashed; now I may be fastidious, but the odour of a room full of school children on a damp day does not ex-

cite any pleasurable feeling in me. No, I fear I was made for a fine lady. I like, as you know, pretty clothes, pretty things about me, and all the luxury and refinement of my life."

"But," he answered, "don't you think, Lady Waldermere, you would have been as happy if you were almost poor instead of very rich, with your natural cheerfulness and resources in yourself?"

"As for my cheerfulness and resources," she answered, "how do you know what they would be if they were tried? and as you choose to ask me, I don't think I should have been happy as a poor woman, and you don't know what my disposition might have been under those circumstances."

"You don't choose to do yourself justice," he answered; "but you are never likely to be tried, I am happy to say, so I can keep my own opinion as to what you would be under the contingency."

"Now, tell me truly, Mr. St. John," she said, "how many of the ladies of your acquaintance, who live a good deal in the country, do you suppose really like visiting at the cottages of the poor? Do you believe

that there are many—I was very near saying any—who like it for itself as an occupation, and who do not do it from a sense of duty, or a feeling of kindness, and a wish to serve those round them ?”

“ Well, I hardly know,” he answered, “ but I am not sure that you are not right, and that there are not so many who really enjoy it ; of course, there is the answer of the feeling of satisfaction, virtue its own reward, and that sort of thing about it, which it brings; not to mention the triumph of self-righteousness in many, but I should feel doubtful if there can be much pleasure in the actual work.”

“ To any one of a refined and sensitive mind,” said Lady Waldermere, “ there must be so much that is painful and disagreeable, both in the sight of so much want and suffering you cannot help, and in the thought of how little difference there really is in the different classes of men. A very few years’ training in early life makes it all. Great refinement of mind, as well as of body, highly cultivated and poetical imagination, all a matter of education ! It cannot but be humiliating to think that it is only the chance of my having had parents rich enough to give me all sorts of

refinement and luxuries in early life, and a command of money since, which has prevented me from being now like that sickly and interesting-looking young woman there, twirling her mop with the tribe of dirty brats behind her. Talk of imagination, and—what is the word now?—æstheticism, isn't it? where would it be as the wife of honest Hodge, as they call him, who is thought a pattern of all that is good as long as he is thick-headed enough to join no union to compel farmers to raise his wages, shows now and then at church, seldom gets drunk, and does not jump on his wife, or put the baby into the copper when it squeals? No!" she went on; "there seems such a vast chasm between the classes, and the difference is only skin deep; you cannot alter it in later life, but you can so easily in early days while the clay is still soft. Look at little Hilda; I feel sometimes quite sad when I think what she might grow up if every advantage in life was taken away from her; it is the education and the life of refinement which puts the polish on. Imagine if there were to be great social commotion, and I were ruined, and perhaps died, what would she be brought up as? And, do you know, Mr. St. John," she

went on, "that there are now people who, before the war in America, were as well off as I am now, friends and neighbours of my mother, who lost everything, literally everything, and not only money and property, but all who could work for them fell in that cruel struggle ; and now there are women, well born, delicately nurtured, used to every luxury of life, and accustomed to be waited on by those to whom their word was law,—who now have to work with their hands for the bread they earn for themselves and their children—children of men the most upright and most honourable, who led in everything, and who made by their enlightened laws America what it is. And now these children have to be educated no better than the children of the old slaves of their parents, except for the kindness of some compatriot less unfortunate. It makes my blood boil when I think of it, and of the way the Yankees have treated our people. Let Mrs. Beecher Stowe rant about the old cruelties of slavery, they were rare exceptions. I am not going to defend slavery, but no cruelties on the slaves are equal to the cruelties that those liberators have inflicted on the unhappy people they conquered by the force of money and

numbers. I will not speak of things that were done in war—war must always be dreadful—but I speak of what was done in the hour of triumph and in the long years since. They made a pretence of making peace, and restoring everything to its former state, only liberating the slaves; but under the pretence of penalties on rebel soldiers, as they called those who had been defending their home, their families, and all they held most dear from Northern tyranny, they committed wholesale robbery and spoliation, and the widow and orphan were the easiest and most natural prey of such wretches. Countenanced and encouraged by the leaders of the North, there came down a swarm of bandits of the lowest class, who, after making up imitations of the old State governments, composed of themselves and negroes, simply appropriated whatever they took a fancy to, and no court that has since been constituted has attempted to make them disgorge their spoils, and there are those among them who bear names well known to Europe, who have stolen, yes, stolen title deeds, and now, to all appearances, hold property legally, the owners of which, women and children, would be now begging their bread were they not too proud

to proclaim their miseries. Can you wonder that the men who have countenanced and encouraged such deeds of villany have by their misgovernment made the government and administration of America a byeword in the world. What else could you expect? They took by force, not their own, the reins of government out of the hands of the hereditary leaders of the country, and put it into the hands of the lowest and most uneducated, and now they are reaping the fruits. You think I speak warmly, Mr. St. John, but you do not realise what the struggle was to us. I say us, for after my father's death, which I cannot remember, I lived in my mother's native town of Richmond for a time, and all the friends of my early days were engaged in that terrible war. My own brother, my only dear brother, who was to me dearer than any one on earth, my ideal of all that was bright and strong and chivalrous as a child, was killed fighting under that greatest and best of men and of generals. All the old friends of my childhood were engaged, and all suffered. I longed so to be a man, and bear my part in it, but if the women could not go to the front and fight, they nobly bore their part in that sad and weary work of

caring for the sick and wounded, nursing and tending those whom they loved best till they were well enough to be sent again to the front, never to return! You hear little enough now of the awful sufferings and sorrows of those days; the survivors are too proud, and have too much pluck to lie down and bemoan their fate; bravely they fought against it, and bravely they have accepted it, but it is none the less heavy and cruel. I sometimes, in the luxurious ease in which I live, feel as though it was wicked of me to have everything that money can bring to make life pleasant, when I think of the hard lot of many who are almost my relations. You think I speak like an American, but how can I do otherwise? English my father may have been, but I never knew him; my mother was devoted to her country, and my earliest associations are with Virginia, and there my dear brother lies; he who had just finished his education in England, with good prospects and fortune, who devoted his young and bright life to a cause he held so sacred."

She paused for a minute, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkling with excitement; never had Wilfred seen her look so perfectly lovely, and he could not help thinking that if it was

for such women, and for the homes which they made happy, it was no wonder that the men of the Southern States fought so fearlessly and well, and he could have said with the poet who saw in his vision the fair Helen,

No marvel, sovereign lady : in fair field
Myself for such a face had boldly died.

Presently she turned to him, and said, " I am afraid, Mr. St. John, that I have astonished you with my vehemence ; this is a topic I never speak of, it is to me too painful, and I should speak to those who do not understand me. I don't know what led me into it now.

" I hope, Lady Waldermore," he answered, " that it was a feeling that I *should* understand you and sympathize with you that led you to talk so. I do, and most deeply."

" Thank you," she said simply, looking round into his face, with an expression in which was a depth of softness and sweetness he had never seen before, " I believe *you* do."

She drove on in silence for some time through the fresh air under the bright morning sun, and both of them were too much occupied with their thoughts to speak ; at last he said,

"How strange it is that though most of us must at times think very seriously of life, we very seldom speak seriously even to our dearest friends."

"I think," she answered, "it is that we don't often come across people we care to open our hearts to, for one thing, and for another, life would be too dismal a thing if we were always in the serious way. We must look as much as possible on the bright side, and though our thoughts may guide our actions, our words need not be always betraying them. Besides I think it is our duty to show the brightest side to all about us. With me it would be a matter of pride to keep my thoughts and feelings out of sight, and so I always try to do."

"And succeed very well," he answered. "I never met any one harder to read than you are, Lady Waldermere. I have never liked to say so to you, but do you know I never in my life saw any one whose character was so difficult to understand as yours?"

"Have you been trying so hard to read it?" she asked, laughing.

"I must confess to a humble effort in that direction," he answered.

“And how far do you think you have succeeded?” she asked.

“Not so very far, I must confess. I am always finding out something new, and often something unexpected; for instance, I have this morning come upon a view I never saw any signs of before, and I don’t know what the next may be. I wonder what you think of your own self?” he asked.

“Do you think I am going to show you how all the tricks are done?” she said, “I should be but a poor conjurer if I let you see all the machinery. You see the tricks, and the effect of them; the secret of their performance is mine, and so it must remain. Take my advice, and don’t seek to know too much, Mr. St. John; if you are too curious, you may discover things you do not like; take the good the gods give you, and ask no questions!”

“Do you mean, Lady Waldermerc, that I might find out depths in you that would destroy the illusion?” he said. “I am not going to take that as your meaning anyhow, but I will ask no more questions. I am content to look and admire, and my admiration and astonishment only grow with the variety I find continually in the view.”

“Then I hope you will never come to any view which may break the spell,” she answered. “But talking of views, what do you think of the one now before us? In summer it is really beautiful,” and as she was speaking she pulled the ponies up to show him the view before them. They looked down on the park, with the old dark red brick and stone house showing itself among the tall limes that surrounded that side of it, and on each side of it stretched long avenues of trees. In a more distant part of the park was a large sheet of water, and masses of wood on the further side of it. Two or three miles away was the small neighbouring town with its church spire towering above it, and a little blue smoke hanging over it, and far away the distant hills looked blue and soft, with here and there a wooded hill-side, and more than one church tower and spire in the far distance.

“Who, after looking at this, could say the midland counties are not beautiful?” he exclaimed.

“I am glad I had a fine day to bring you up here,” she said; “this is my favourite view; and here I come in the summer when I want to refresh my mind with the beauties of

nature. And now I will show you how the ponies can trot when they are going home to luncheon."

And so saying she gave them their heads, and they went off down the hill at a pace that made Wilfred wonder at the nerves of the fair charioteer, and in a very few minutes they were at the old porch of the house.

That evening they were still alone, no more guests being expected till the following day, and after dinner they had gone into the drawing-room. Sir Henry was sitting reading near the fire, in front of which Brebis had stretched out her black curls on a white bear-skin, and Lady Waldermere was sitting at the pianoforte, which she had been playing on in a desultory manner while talking to Wilfred. Presently she said to him, "Mr. St. John, you heard me talk of my old days in Virginia to-day for the first time, and I think I must have astonished you by my warmth and enthusiasm when I talked about the war. I have been wondering since why a small discussion about the difference of education between the rich and poor should have led me to break out like that. But you must try to forget that you ever heard me so warm. It is a

subject I never allude to, for I cannot contain myself when I do."

"Please don't ask me to forget what I have heard," he said, "for you hardly can imagine the different thoughts your words roused up in me, and I fear, however much you might desire it, that I could never forget our drive this morning. I always had the deepest sympathy with the South in their great struggle for independence, and I have often regretted that I did not do as more than one friend of mine did, go and fight for them. I was leading a useless idle life at the time, and if I had survived it, should have been a better man for having seen so serious and earnest a side of life. I remember so well the enthusiasm that the singing the song 'My Maryland' used to excite here in England; they must be quite sacred words to you."

"Did you ever hear," she asked, "the last Southern song, written since the war? the words are so pretty, and it is so little known in England."

"I don't think I ever did," he answered, "but I should like to very much. I so wish you would sing it. I know you can sing, and very well I have never let me hear you."

“I will make this one exception, and for this one song,” she said, “but it is only for you to hear the words of it which sound better to music. It goes to the tune of the Wearing of the Green, and is called the Wearing of the Gray, in memory of the dear old uniform.”

Lady Waldermere then sang in a very sweet voice, and with the most perfect expression, the following words:—

Oh! have you heard the cruel news? Alas, it is too true!
Upon the Apomattox down went our cross of blue,
Our armies have surrendered, and bowed to Northern sway,
And for evermore forbidden is the Wearing of the Gray,

No more on fields of battle waves the banner of our pride,
In vain beneath its crimson folds our Stewart and Jackson
died;

Like a meteor of the evening that flag has passed away,
And low are they who guarded it, the Wearers of the Gray.

I met a Mississippian, right hard my hand he wrung,
The tear was in his dauntless eye, and faltering was his tongue,
As in broken words he told me of that disastrous day,
Which made a badge of infamy the Wearing of the Gray.

Now honour to each patriot bold that's to his country true,
And shame on every Southron cur who wears the foe's
blue!

While round the Blue Ridge rocky peaks the evening mist
shall play,

We'll, like our mountains, never leave the Wearing of the
Gray!

Remember how we scattered them beneath those mountains old,
How we tamed the power of the strong, the valour of the
bold,

When thundering through the bloody gap old Longstreet
thrust his way,

Remember this and ne'er forsake the Wearing of the Gray!

We have lost all but honour, yet our country bears no shame,
And though borne down by numbers, still we wear our an-
cient fame,

And though exiles from our native land in distant climes we
stray,

We'll not forget our early love, but proudly Wear the Gray!

Then here's to our companions bold, who in the field have
died

In the forefront of the battle closely fighting by our side,

Though our lips be little used to prayer, yet for their souls
we'll pray,

Who fell beneath that banner for the Wearing of the Gray!

But the time is fast approaching, it's not distant many years,
That shall bring revenge and triumph, and dry our bitter
tears,

When the azure cross shall float again, no more to pass away,
And the token of our victory be, the Wearing of the Gray!

Wilfred sat perfectly spellbound while she sang those pathetic words. There was a depth of feeling in her voice that carried every word home to him, as she seemed to be pouring out her whole soul with the music. She sat silent for a minute when she had finished gazing into the air, and then turned slowly

round to him, and as she bent her soft eyes on him, he could see the large tears sparkling in them, and he with difficulty restrained his own.

“What wonder they fought so !” he said to her in a low voice. “If they had such as you to fight for, Lady Waldermere, what could not a man do after you had sung to him such words as those ! if he had you to die for, or you to place the wreath of bays on his brow if he returned victorious !”

“Yet,” she answered, not noticing or heeding the reference of his words to herself, “though so many died, there were those who were conquered, and the greatest and best survived to die of a broken heart. I have always been so glad that I knew him and loved him. The world does not yet do full justice to the noble character, as well as splendid abilities, of General Lee ; but history will be just to his memory, and in future days, when the bitterness of the strife has passed away, his wonderful genius as a commander will be understood, and his self-devotion and perfect self-denial will be held up to the admiration of the world, as they should be. Mr. St. John, who have you in England among the great men of the last hundred years who

can compare with him? He fought, and was ready to give his life for what he believed to be a just and holy cause; and when that cause was hopeless, he forgot party feeling and party bitterness, and devoted himself to his country, till his noble heart broke with the injustice he saw around him,—injustice he could do so little to alleviate!”

“There are many, Lady Waldermere, who *do* do him justice,” said Wilfred, “but the events of those days are so near that we do not yet see how brightly his glory shines above all the rest, and unfortunately his name is prejudiced with so many who only look upon him as the great champion for the maintenance of slavery. There was immense sympathy in England with the South, but the North enlisted very many here by the cry of abolition, and that feeling still goes on.”

“Yes,” she answered sadly, “it is but too true, slavery cannot be defended, and those who do not understand the whole causes of the struggle, will only think that Lee fought against the abolitionists; but slavery was not the real cause of the war, nor was slavery so fearful a thing as it was declared to be in the pages of the righteous author of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’

for whom the privacy of no family is sacred, and for whose pen no story is too foul, or calumny too base, so that she may add to herself a little more notoriety, and put a few more dirty dollars in her pocket. A worthy sister of a worthy brother, indeed ! What a cause must liberation have been, if it needed such an apostle ! ”

Lady Waldermere was silent for a minute while she recovered from her burst of indignation, and Wilfred said to her, “ Do you believe in the words of the last verse of your song ? ”

“ No,” she said, “ I do not,—revenge we shall never have, our cause is lost for ever ; only in the dreams of poets and women can the hope of revenge and triumph exist. The men of the South have set themselves to work to repair what has been done, and in long years some things will amend ; the best men, the most respected and respectable men will eventually once more rise to power, but our loved confederation is a dream of the past. Men have forgiven much, but we women cannot pardon—there were deeds done that we can never forgive ; but we can only sing of revenge, and give our bitterest curse to those

who not only crushed us, but insulted us when we were down."

"Can you really feel so bitterly?" he asked.

"Can I not?" she said, with her eyes flashing. "I told you to-day to beware of trying to fathom too deeply. You see what you have come to already. You think you can judge so much of human nature and character; but what do you know of the effects of a southern sun even on your slow Anglo-Saxon blood? And you expect to find men with as chilly blood as yourself!"

"I won't fight about it," he answered, "but I almost think you do injustice to the warmth of our feelings here; but do you think it is in any way a shock to me, or a trying thing to find you with such deep feelings? If you do, I must tell you how mistaken you are; after the cold indifference I have been so often used to find, after seeing every impulse ground down by the rules of convention and propriety till there remains often nothing but a machine, whose chief pleasure is in saying unpleasant things about those who have not so thoroughly subdued their feelings, do you not think it is really delightful to find some one

whose feelings are only masked, but whose heart, under the restraint which the world has imposed upon it, beats with all the passions of a human being? They say, Lady Waldermere, that those who can hate well, have also the counterpart in their nature."

"Do they, Mr. St. John?" she said. "Are you sure that *they* know what they are talking about? But come," she said, getting up to break off the subject, "we are getting too dismal. I will play you at *écarté*, or even the Yankée's favourite Euchre if you like. We will not cry during this last evening we shall have in quietness."

The rest of the evening was pleasant enough, but Lady Waldermere had so effectually broken the spell, that they returned no more to the subject of the song, and the sorrows and misfortunes of the Southerners.

That evening, after Sir Henry had left Wilfred alone in the smoking-room, where he never stayed long, not being much given to smoking or sitting up late, he sat for long gazing at the glowing logs, with Brebis curled up in the arm-chair opposite to him, blinking at him every now and then with sleepy eyes, and evidently wondering what he could be

doing sitting there alone so long doing nothing, and keeping her from the place on the foot of his bed that she had insisted on appropriating. And long and deeply he thought, and in the red fire-light he saw armies in the field, he saw battles lost and won, and great generals in council, and he saw men whose lives were devoted and sacrificed to what they held sacred, who scorned the ease and comfort of life when there was real work to do in the world; and he saw beyond all a lady more beautiful, more charming than all, who was the spirit and the goddess who excited all, and encouraged all, a glance of approval from whose eyes, or a word of encouragement from whose lips, was sufficient reward for all toils and labours. His own past life, with its little toils and hardships, its attempts and failures, seemed so insignificant that he felt he must indeed change if a word of approval or encouragement was ever to come to him from that fair being. "What must life be with such a one as her to guide it!" he thought; "but who that I ever knew is worthy of it? She should be the companion and helpmate of a hero! Of such a one as the General of her native land, whose memory she worships—who else is worthy of her?"

And what is her lot in life ? ” And he looked deeper and deeper into the red fire, and sat gloomily thinking till the logs were cold and grey.

CHAPTER XII.

WILFRED stayed some days longer at Waldermere Park, and in spite of other guests saw much of Lady Waldermere, but he never succeeded in making her talk again as she had done on the first day he was there, and she easily and quietly avoided becoming in the least enthusiastic on any subject he might try to draw her out upon. That burst of enthusiasm was like the sudden lifting on one side of the corner of a curtain, showing a glimpse of a strange and beautiful picture behind it, but which is almost immediately drawn back again, and the picture impenetrably veiled. He became greater friends than ever with little Hilda and her Brebis, and even Flossy, in the absence of her admirer, Sir Percy, condescended to imitate her mother and be very kind to him. His life was becoming

almost too pleasant, and he was beginning to feel himself a part of the family, but the time came when he could propose to stay no longer ; and he felt that even if Lady Waldermere had wished it, she could not have asked him to prolong his visit without its appearing strange. Sir Henry and he got on together well enough ; they had little really in common, but Wilfred was a man of the world, of very varied experience, and could without any difficulty take some interest in Sir Henry's various occupations, and not unfrequently be of use to him, so that he made him welcome for as long as his wife chose to ask him to stay.

Easter was early that year, so the Waldermeres arranged to stay in the country till Whitsuntide, coming up to London, perhaps, for a few days first, and Wilfred did not require much pressing to make him promise to come down for a few days at Whitsuntide, and see the place in all its beauty of early summer.

As he left the park, he could not help contrasting his present feelings with what they were on his coming there but a few days before. He was then fresh from the impression of all Mrs. Addington had said, and he thought

he had quite determined to show how indifferent he could be to the fascinating lady he had just parted with. The hints which Mrs. Addington had let drop about the passages in the past life of Lady Waldermere, and the casual mention of Sir Percy Fitzroy's name in connection with hers, were then rankling in him, and he thought he had come down there perfectly safe from all fear of entangling himself in a dangerous and hopeless attachment. He had reasoned within himself that he was too old and too battered to have any absurd romantic ideas, and that there could be no possible reason why he should not enjoy the friendship and society of the most agreeable woman he had ever met, but he had never quite dared to analyse to the bottom what his real feelings about her were, and he was now paying the penalty.

Reluctantly he had to own to himself, when he had parted from her, that he was as deeply and enthusiastically in love with Lady Waldermere as if he were a boy of twenty. Her image was now even before him ; he remembered her words on every subject they had talked of, and her influence was upon every thought and deed of his life.

Wilfred St. John was a man who had a very high sense of honour, and would have been among the first to condemn any man who deliberately set himself to make love to the wife of a man whose hospitality he had continually enjoyed; and though to some degree his sense of the moral wrong of so doing had by being among the Bohemians of the world been a little blunted, he was by no means insensible to it to a high degree. But he did not consider that he had been guilty of any offence, either against honour and morality, or against hospitality. He felt that Lady Waldermere liked him, but he had no reason whatever to think that she had any feeling beyond ordinary friendship for him; on the contrary, he believed that she had sufficient command over herself, if not sufficient insensibility to the powers of pleasing of any man, and certainly of him himself, to run no risk whatever of even for one minute compromising herself or her tranquillity of mind. And as for his love for her, it had grown up without his knowing it. He had begun with admiration, and then had gone on with curiosity and the desire to understand more deeply a character the like of which he had never met before. Then he

had become more and more interested, her apparent indifference as to whether he liked her or not had piqued him, and her insensibility to any emotion whatever when he met her or parted from her,—such is the strange contradictory nature of man,—only attracted him the more. Then had followed his close intimacy with her, and after that the bitter thoughts that Mrs. Addington's words had aroused in him. If he had been able to understand his mind more thoroughly, he would have known that the state in which he came down to Waldermere Park was anything but one for ensuring calm indifference in daily and intimate intercourse with a woman who had already so deeply interested him, but he had neither realised it, nor in truth would he have wished to, and probably if he had known his danger, he would not have turned aside from it. Now he felt that so far as he was concerned the mischief was done, and he must think of the future. Many and various were the ideas which passed through his brain; he thought of following the example of the knights of old, who, when they had fallen under the influence of some hopeless passion, wandered about the world doing

reckless and valiant deeds in honour of the lady of their love, sometimes useful, sometimes perhaps very much the contrary.

But grand as these things might be to read of in the pages of the 'Morte d'Arthur,' and the old books of romance, the world had become so very prosaic and practical that he was more likely to make a fool of himself, and to emulate the achievements of the unfortunate Spanish Don, than of any of the knights of romance whom he tried so vainly to follow. Should he go away, wander abroad again, and once more try to make his way in the world? He had the advantage of experience, it was true, but none of the buoyant hope and expectation of youth to cheer him along; the romance of that life was hopelessly gone, there remained only the hard work of it, and the dreariness of exile from his own country, with the feeling that if after years of labour he did succeed, he would be too old to return to England and enjoy his success. No; that would never do; why after all, should he go? If he could live in England what did it matter?—his life might not be very useful, but then there were others to do useful things; besides, he would do something and make himself use-

ful, why should he go away just as life was becoming pleasant to him? Why could he not be a friend to the charming woman whose society now constituted to him all that was delightful upon earth? he would devote himself to her service, he might be of use to her by remaining near her; and certainly of more use than by going away and never seeing or coming near her: then he really loved the little Hilda, he could all his life take the deepest interest in her, it would be something to live for, something to tie him to life here; and as far as her mother was concerned, if he kept his feelings to himself, what possible harm was done? He might have moments of pain, but, on the other hand, there would be days of great happiness when he was near her; his love for her was so full of the highest and truest respect that she would never even suspect it, and he would put such a watch over himself that she should see no change whatever in him. As long as he thus guarded himself in all his intercourse, it was impossible that he could have to accuse himself of one word or thought contrary to any sense of duty or honour. After all, the danger and pain were his, and not hers, and he

could suffer and be still, if suffering there might be. No, if he had by chance discovered his own secret, no one else had, and things could go on just as before. No harm had been done, or would be, and so after two or three days' uneasiness he settled down into his old life again, now and then running down into the country for a day's hunting, and spending most of his evenings at the whist-table. But as far as Lady Waldermere was concerned, he looked forward to seeing her again as the one thing in life to dream of, and he had so satisfactorily arranged matters in his own mind that he had no misgivings whatever about the future; he would enjoy what there was to enjoy to the uttermost, and if any pain should come to him, he would regard it only as the necessary payment for his happiness.

Easter came, and brought the Addingtons up to London at the end of Easter week, to stay for the season. Hunting was pretty well over, and the country had no more attraction for the lively Lady of Kirthorpe. Wilfred was in London when they came up, and received an invitation to dinner as soon as the cook had had time to heat the copper, to

which he responded by presenting himself in Prince's Gate in person.

Mrs. Addington asked him at once about his visit to the Waldermeres, and showed him that she was very curious to know on what terms he was with Lady Waldermere, whether he was closer friends with her than ever, or whether either chance or what little she had said to him at Kirthorpe had cooled the alliance between them, and perhaps brought him back again to his old allegiance to her. But Wilfred was very hard to get anything out of, and Mrs. Addington was dissatisfied accordingly.

Mrs. Addington was a woman in whom was a strange mixture of good and bad. Accustomed to have her own way all her life, she was quite spoilt; and though naturally of a kindly disposition, she could not understand being thwarted in anything she had made up her mind to, and so resolved was she always to gain her end that she was not very scrupulous what means she used to sweep any obstacle from her path. Always ready to help a friend, she would do many kindnesses, and would really take trouble, and put herself out to do them; but if it was a question of their comfort and happiness or hers, it never seemed

to occur to her that there could be one moment's hesitation in the choice between the two. If she had understood what she was doing, she would have been the first to condemn it, but even the having condemned it would very likely not have turned her from any line of conduct that she was bent on, as she would have found some excuse for it which would have thoroughly satisfied herself. She was a woman of strong passions more than of deep feelings, and given to following her impulses, quite reckless of consequences, and more than one scrape in her past life bore testimony to her thoughtlessness and her disregard of many of the ordinary restraints of society.

She had certainly liked him very much, but it was a question if she had ever cared very deeply for Wilfred St. John, yet she had found him a very agreeable companion, and he with his very impressive manner, had made her think that he was at one time her devoted slave. Perhaps if she had not been so ready to accept what was most pleasant to herself, and had stopped for a short time to contemplate her slave, she would have perceived that half what she took for devotion in him, was his habitual manner towards every agreeable

woman who took his fancy, and the other half as much due to the readiness she showed in extending to him her favour, as to the peculiar fascination she had exercised upon him.

Her marriage had not been a very happy one; but though her husband may have had many faults, it was rather a question whether any man could have been found who could have fixed the volatile nature and unstable affections of the spoilt child. She always considered herself *une femme incomprise*, and persuaded herself that if fate had only linked her to the man of her imagination, she would have been the best of wives, and the most contented of women. May be it would have been so, but her best friends were inclined to think that her disposition was too restless, and that she was too self-willed, ever to have been much happier and more satisfied with any man. She had taken this fancy for Wilfred, and for a short time had invested him in her imagination with all the attributes which she considered made up a man who would be a perfect husband. It is fair to say that he was not the first man who had been so elevated in her mind, but the failure of her former idols

to hold their place when tested by better acquaintance, had not discouraged her from replacing them when broken. Mrs. Addington was now smarting under the combined effects of the discovery that her latest slave was not as much devoted as she had thought, and had a little slighted her after the plainest marks of favour, and moreover had chosen to devote himself to a friend of hers, of whose charms she had always been a little jealous, but with whom she had never yet come into conflict. Her pride was now wounded, for she had taken the pains to let Wilfred see plainly enough how much she liked him, whereas she had every reason to believe that Lady Waldermere had, till the time of his stay in the house in Park Lane, always seemed to show no more liking for him than for any one else, and had never allowed him to become intimate with her even as much as Sir Percy Fitzroy, so that as far as she knew he had attached himself to her without any encouragement, at any rate up to the last time she had seen them together.

How much Lady Waldermere might care for him she had no means of judging, but she felt somehow intuitively, that she did like him

very much. She was now fast arriving at the stage when she was not sure whether she was very fond of Wilfred or hated him. He almost provoked her by his extreme agreeableness, and the evident pleasure he had in meeting her again and being with her, and she could not make up her mind to resign him to her rival, as she now began to consider Lady Waldermere. No, he must return to his allegiance if she could make him, but if that were impossible she was determined that she would separate him from Lady Waldermere, and if she could not bring him to her own feet he should never lie at those of the beautiful Anglo-American.

She was now anxious to find out on what terms the two were, and she meant to guide herself in the coming season according to what she could discover about the position of things between them. She felt no compunction and no misgiving as to any means she took, considering that any weapon was fair to fight with on such an occasion, and she was resolved to win him back if she could, and if that were not possible, to be revenged on both of them.

She had not yet arrived at a real bitterness, but she was on the verge of it, and it would

require very little to make her from a friend of Lady Waldermere into her bitter enemy ; but first she must see her, see them together, and judge for herself ; she could not, however, resist attacking Lady Waldermere again, by insinuating to Wilfred that she was not the immaculate angel she appeared.

“ I wonder what has become of Percy Fitzroy,” she said to him ; “ I cannot think what can have made him stay abroad these ages—he never used to be able to tear himself away from the fair lady of his heart for so long before. Do you think he has deserted the fair mistress of Waldermere Park, and left the field open to other admirers ? I don’t fancy she will be long in filling up the vacancy if he has.”

“ I don’t know the least where he is,” answered Wilfred ; “ but I suppose he is wandering about the Continent,” he added, not choosing to notice the allusion to Lady Waldermere.

“ I suppose her ladyship has not had any little runs up to London to do her shoppings this winter, as she had no one here to take care of her,” went on Mrs. Addington returning to the charge. “ You have hardly been admitted

to the high honours of *cavaliere servante* which Sir Percy used to fill, have you, Mr. St. John ?”

“ Well,” he answered, laughing, but inwardly much irritated, “ I hardly know what those honours might be, but I cannot pretend to have ever been *cavaliere servante* to that lady in any sense.”

“ You don’t know what those honours might be ?” said the merciless Mrs. Addington. “ Why, have you never in your gay and chequered career been the intimate and favoured friend of any fair lady ? I thought, Mr. St. John, that your experience had run the round of most of the places that an agreeable man can fill, and I should have thought that you would know pretty well what it was to be on those favoured terms with so pretty a woman as Lady Waldermere. Sir Percy has always had good taste, and I have no doubt that it is some very charming creature that keeps him far from his old flame. Did you see any signs of her feeling his desertion ?” she asked, half laughing.

Wilfred was very angry at the tone in which Mrs. Addington was talking, but he did not dare to show it, and he felt that he must be

most guarded in his reply, as he was in danger of betraying his secret.

"But I never knew," he said, "that Sir Percy was such a great friend of Lady Waldermere's; she has never said much about him to me, but then she was hardly likely to if he were, and I fear, Mrs. Addington, that you have come to the wrong place for any information on the subject."

But the lady was not going to be put off, and she wanted to drive Wilfred into an attempt to defend Lady Waldermere, so she continued,

"It seems strange, after the very great friends that they were, that he should go away and leave her for the whole winter; it must be rather a relief though to Sir Henry I should think. What a nice tame cat you must be about the house after that dangerous wolf! I always have wondered how Sir Percy has managed to steer so clear of public scandals so far; he must have more luck than he deserves."

"Really," answered Wilfred, "I know so little of the past life of Sir Percy that I am no judge; you see, Mrs. Addington, that, till a year ago, I have been very little in England

for several years, so you must forgive my ignorance of the *chronique scandaleuse*."

"I should not have thought that it wanted much knowledge of the *chronique scandaleuse*," she said, "to know what an intimate admirer of that lady Sir Percy was. Why, even your own eyes might have told you that in the course of the last year."

"I have seen they were great friends, but nothing else," he replied, getting more and more distressed and annoyed at the line she was taking.

"You must be more innocent, then, than I took you for, Mr. St. John," she went on; "but I am often inclined to think that in spite of your varied experience of the world, you are very easily taken in by a pretty woman."

"I hope I am yet innocent of a great deal," he answered, with difficulty restraining his indignation at her thinly-veiled insinuations, and longing to tell her that he would stake his life on his belief in Lady Waldermere's honour.

"But you have not told me yet how you like your position as consoler, or if you have been promoted to that rank. You are very

reticent about the delights of Waldermere Park," said Mrs. Addington.

"Really," Mrs. Addington," he said, at last too much roused to restrain himself, "I don't know what you mean, and I feel that I must be dreaming, or have quite misunderstood what you are saying about Lady Waldermere. I like her very much, as I think you must know, and I have also a very great respect for her,—please, don't let your love of chaff carry you on to let me think that you, of all people, can mean to say anything ill-natured of her. I am sure you don't mean what you say, or I quite misunderstand you."

"Why, I was only chaffing you," said Mrs. Addington, who saw that she was going dangerously far; "I wanted to get a rise out of you, as they call it now, and I think I have succeeded," she added, laughing.

"Our successes may cost too dear sometimes, Mrs. Addington," he said, getting up to take leave; "but I am afraid I must be off now, so *au revoir, ma chère madame.*"

He walked away down the park, from Mrs. Addington's house, feeling very angry and hurt. He did not believe a word of what she

had been saying about Lady Waldermere and Sir Percy Fitzroy, but her words left a most painful feeling behind them. It was hard to see the brightness of his goddess soiled for the moment, and he not able to defend her. What could he say? How easy for Mrs. Addington, or any one else who chose to abuse her, to tell him that he knew nothing of her past history; that he had not only not known her then, but had been far away from England. They might say what they liked, and if he stood up in her defence, laugh at him as her champion, because he was fascinated by her, and was the one in favour at the moment! His defence of her would do more harm than good. Then, though he felt convinced of her purity and goodness, how very possible it was that she might have committed some imprudent act, which the world might ill-naturedly have got hold of. Might she not herself have been alluding to something which he had better not know? when she warned him not to search too deeply into her past history. He was beginning already to see what his love for her might cost him; how he would have to hear the unkind speeches of the world about her, and to close his lips in her behalf. The days were gone

by when he could call out any man who spoke slightingly of her, and thus ensure that her name was respected in his presence, and the tongue of a woman like Mrs. Addington it was impossible to silence, as he felt that any sign of annoyance on his part would but add fuel to the fire of her cutting speeches. He felt he had let himself be carried on in the stream so far, and that the future and the end he could not even guess it.

END OF VOL. II.

HILDA WALDERMERE.

HILDA WALDERMERE

A Novel.

SYDNEY MORGAN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON;
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HILDA.

CHAPTER I.

WILFRED felt, after his visit to her, very much inclined to avoid the society of Mrs. Addington, but he saw that he could do no good by so doing, and that he would only offend her, and make her say more unpleasant things when she did meet him. She had shown no sign of breaking off amicable relations with him, and if she intended to declare war on Lady Waldermere for any reason, it was better to leave her to do it herself, and not to precipitate matters by any interference on his part. He therefore let things go on much as they used to, and went to see her frequently, the more so as he was agreeably surprised that she never indulged in another such bitter attack on their friend.

He had been away from London for two or three days on a visit to some of his relations, and was calling on Mrs. Addington rather late in the afternoon of the day he returned, when he was surprised to find Lady Waldermere sitting with her. He was greeted most warmly by both ladies, and found that the Waldermeres had come up to London rather unexpectedly on some business of Sir Henry's, who had declared he must come up, so his wife said she would not be left alone in the country.

He expected to see some sign of guilt in Mrs. Addington after her attack upon her friend, but she showed not one trace of it, and was apparently the same affectionate friend of hers as ever. So particularly affectionate, almost gushing was she, that he began to believe that he must have dreamed all he remembered Mrs. Addington saying of her dearest Hilda, or that really she had been only intending to chaff him about his supposed *tendresse* for that lady, and had gone a little too far accidentally, in what she said to stir him up. But his uneasiness was not altogether allayed, only lulled, and he could not but believe that there was a storm laid by in store that would break fiercely enough in due time.

He had not been long in the room when he found that both the ladies were dying to tell him something; and at last Mrs. Addington began,—

“I am quite sure, Mr. St. John, that you have not heard the latest news, so I must warn you to harden your heart, and to bear it with philosophy. I would prepare you for the shock if I could, but I know your natural fortitude, and I and Hilda both think the news can be broken to you without fear of serious consequences. You know, Mr. St. John, that life is full of disappointments, and that prizes occasionally slip from our grasp when we think them most surely within our reach.”

“I will bear your news as best I may, when you have communicated the dreadful intelligence,” said Wilfred, wondering what on earth she could be driving at; “but I so fully believe in the blessedness of those who expect nothing, that I cannot feel any dread of a bitter disappointment to myself.”

“Very easy to say, Mr. St. John,” she answered, “but when people make most boast of their philosophy, I am always most sceptical of it; but the news you shall have. Mrs. Henderson has married Frank Digby!”

“ Married Frank Digby ! ” he exclaimed, unable to conceal his astonishment.

Both ladies burst out laughing at his face of surprise, and Mrs. Addington said, “ Now bear it like a man. Shall I ring for some brandy, or will you have my bottle of salts ? ”

“ I will bear it,” he answered, “ without the aid of stimulants ; but I will honestly confess my astonishment.”

“ And no other sentiment ? ” asked Lady Waldermere. “ Come, Mr. St. John, be frank with us, and confess, has it never occurred to your mind that the fair widow’s comely, not to say comfortable person, and extremely good fortune, would have helped you out of many difficulties, and made you an easy-going home ? ”

It would have been untrue of him to deny that he had ever thought of such a thing. Mrs. Henderson was a very old friend of his, was most good-tempered and easy-going, and not at all bad-looking. Since her recent accession to a large fortune he had more than once thought that to marry his old friend would be an easy road out of his debts and difficulties, and would tie him to a quiet comfortable life,

in which he should grow fat and slow, bidding adieu for ever to all the worries and excitements of life. It would have been unfair to say that he felt sure that he might have had the fair widow for the asking, but his vanity had led him to believe that there were much more impossible things. He had really once or twice seriously considered since he left Glen Dhu whether he should not go in search of the lady, and then leave things to chance when he found her ; if he drifted into being her husband, then he was safely landed on the shores of plenty ; and if not, why, no harm was done. He had never thought of it so much as when he left Kirthorpe, and more than once he nearly made up his mind to leave the cold winds of England, and follow the fair widow to her winter retreat at Nice, where he could unite his attentions to her, with occasional ones to M. Blanc's fascinating establishment at Monte Carlo. But his visit to Waldermere Park drove all such ideas out of his head ; and after his ideal of a woman had been so raised by his intercourse with Lady Waldermere, he gave up entirely all ideas on the subject. But now, though he never for one moment thought any more of asking Mrs.

Henderson to be his wife, and had not one particle of jealousy towards Frank Digby, he felt to his surprise that his vanity, or something of that sort within him, was a little wounded at the unexpected news.

The sensation of feeling that there was a prize like that within his grasp had been rather pleasant, and now he could not but feel within himself that perhaps all the time he had been over confident, and he felt that the two ladies with him had both read to a considerable extent what his feelings were, and were now amused accordingly at his discomfiture.

He had to pull himself together a little, as he answered, "I have not much to confess that I know of. I am very much out at elbows, and she is decidedly rich, and, as Lady Waldermere says, a very fine woman; but I don't quite see why I need have been coupled with her."

"Oh! that won't do at all," said Lady Waldermere. "Where has your usual readiness of speech gone to? We shall begin to think that the iron has begun to enter into your soul if you can tell us nothing better than that."

“ But what on earth do you want me to tell you ? ” he asked.

“ Why, whether you ever thought of going in search of the well-endowed widow ? ” said Mrs. Addington ; “ and if you are not a little shocked to hear that the gay Lothario, Frank Digby, has cut you out ? But now confess, for I know it is true, that you thought in your very inmost secret heart that the widow would be a very good thing to fall back upon, that you might flirt a little more first, and enjoy your liberty a little longer, and then take refuge from the storms of the world on her ample bosom,—now, didn’t you ? ”

There was so much truth at the bottom in what Mrs. Addington was saying that he hesitated a little as he said, “ Really, do you think it is fair to try to make a man confess what his casual thoughts about a lady may have been ? ”

“ It’s true ! it’s true ! ” exclaimed both ladies in fits of laughter at his discomfiture ; “ but you will console yourself very soon, will you not ? ” said Mrs. Addington, “ or will you say revenge is sweet, and set your wicked mind to work to disturb the tranquillity of poor Frank’s domestic life ? Oh ! Hilda, do

you remember my chaffing Alice about Frank Digby? and telling her she should marry him, and then by making him desperately jealous, pay him out for all his past sins,—how little I thought then he would ever marry her! What fun if she would flirt now! but I am afraid there is no chance of it. He can't have thought much of her then, for he would not give up his yachting with that disreputable friend of his to come to Glen Dhu."

"You forget, my dear," said Lady Waldermere, "that the interesting creature only came into this wealth after her visit to Scotland. I wonder if Master Frank borrowed money to go to Monaco on spec of this; but he is not a bad fellow in spite of all the scrapes he has got into in his life, and I don't see why they should not get on well enough together. One knows the old saying about a reformed rake, and now we shall see how much truth there is in it. Wealth makes some men go to the bad, but I have seen it not unfrequently make some very doubtful characters become highly respectable men; as Becky Sharpe said so truly, it was easy enough to be honest—on how many thousand a-year was it? but something much under what Frank and Alice will have after al

his debts are paid. A man can afford to be highly respectable on nine or ten thousand a year. I never heard of a burglar with an independent fortune."

"But all this time," said Wilfred, "you have never told me about it, and why they have been married so quickly and quietly. You two good ladies have been so determined to have your little joke at my expense that you have left me dying of curiosity."

"To know why your consent and blessing were not asked! and why Frank Digby did not telegraph for you as best man?" said Mrs. Addington.

"No, do please be serious for one minute and tell me about it," he said.

"He is dying of curiosity," said Lady Waldermere. "I am sure the old story of our first parents is wrong, and that it was Adam who was curious to know the flavour of the apple, he has bequeathed such a large share of that quality to his sons; they beat us hollow in their search for information. But guess now, Mr. St. John, do you think they eloped?"

"I don't know who on earth there was to elope from, unless it was hard to get

the consent of that old maid of Mrs. Francis Digby's. I wonder she allowed it. I am sure it will not suit her book at all," he said in rather a grumpy tone.

"Is she too a confidante of yours?" said Mrs. Addington. "Why, your intimate friends crop up at every turn! How is it she has not written to you to tell you all about it?"

"I don't believe they are married at all," said Wilfred.

"Oh! ain't they though," said Mrs. Addington, "married and everything else, all in due form; the Bishop of something married them in the English church at Nice, and half the haunTERS of Monte Carlo attended, they say. There were enough grass widows in the church to do for brides—well—whatever attendants widows take with them to the hymeneal altar on such occasions."

"And that Frank Digby could hardly escape from the crowd of men who came to congratulate him, and to borrow a little money of him," said Lady Waldermere.

"But why did they do it in such a hurry?" said Wilfred.

“Hurry!” said Mrs. Addington, “why, they were engaged a fortnight, and Alice had got such an outfit in Paris on her way out there, that she was quite smart enough to go to the bridal chamber without any more clothes; and then I am sure you must allow that they are both old enough, so why should they wait, unless, as I said, it was to ask your consent, and you can tell them now that you give it them, and your blessing too, if you like.”

“Well, they have done it quietly enough,” he said; “I don’t believe any one in England suspected that such a thing was going on. I am sure though that they have my best wishes even at this late hour, and may they live long and proper, and see their children’s children doing all sort of things. What a count Frank will be, and how he will lay down the law; but he will now have to give up talking of his old wicked days.”

“He has told us all so much about them,” said Mrs. Addington, “that it don’t matter much if he does or not, and I am sure Alice knows all about him; he used to take the greatest delight in always shocking her. But it really is a funny marriage. I shall be so

much amused to see them together when they return to England. What a blessed contrast he must be to number one ! He was as slow as old time, they say, and had never kissed any one but his nurse in his life till he married Alice ; well, if practice makes perfect, poor dear, she has got perfection at last ! ”

“ I am sure I wish them every happiness,” said Wilfred, for want of having anything better to say.

“ How kind and thoughtful of you,” said Mrs. Addington ; “ do you mean to offer to stand godfather to their first born ? I am sure Alice would appreciate the attention. I’ll tell her when I see her how much interested you were at the news, and said that you trusted that, as so old an admirer of hers, you would be allowed to be sponsor to the first little Frank, and see that he did *not* follow in the steps of his sainted Pa.”

“ I have no doubt,” said Wilfred, considerably ‘ riz ’—as the Yankees call it—“ that when the happy couple return, your ready wit will supply quite enough chaff for them without my assistance.”

“ Well, if it does not, I will ask you for it, I promise you,” said Mrs. Addington.

Wilfred felt that he had decidedly not got much the best of Mrs. Addington in this encounter, so after a short time he took his leave, having made arrangements for helping to amuse the ladies during the next few days.

When he was gone, Mrs. Addington said, "How curious it is what a lot of vanity there is in men! Now, though Wilfred St. John never was a bit in love with Alice, yet he was much flattered at thinking she cared for him a good deal, and I am sure his vanity received a severe shock when he heard the sudden news of her desertion of him."

"Vanity!" said Lady Waldermere, "they are mostly made up of vanity," even the humblest of them, if you want to manage a man his vanity is by far the best thing to work on; tickle it gently and he is like a lamb in your hands, he will sit down and purr like a cat, but give it a touch the wrong way, and he can hardly forgive you. They are, too, mostly so ignorant of it, and really do think that vanity only belongs to woman,—I don't believe that the vainest woman can hold a candle to a man."

Having delivered this sentiment, which fully coincided with the words of the

preacher, though perhaps not exactly with his meaning, Lady Waldermere also departed from Mrs. Addington's house, on the best of terms with the mistress of it, who to all appearance had put aside all her feelings of jealousy, and perhaps for the moment had really done so, for she was of too cheerful and lively a nature not to be pleased at meeting so amusing and pleasant a companion again, and besides, had as yet no tangible ground of offence, so that she could quite afford to give the pair another chance before she banished them from her good graces altogether.

The next four or five days passed away pleasantly enough, Lady Waldermere was not settled in London yet, so that she had much leisure time, and the lively Mrs. Addington always seemed to be able to find plenty of time for all social amusements as well as duties. The two ladies and Wilfred often met, and they made little parties, and enjoyed the first spring days in London to the utmost.

Mrs. Addington asked Wilfred one day if he would not come down to Kirthorpe with them for Whitsuntide, which they intended to run down to for a few days, before

leaving it in all its leafy summer beauty to the gardeners and the keepers. He declined with every possible thanks for her kind invitation, but had to confess that he was engaged to go to Waldermere Park. When he told her, he thought he saw the slightest mark of displeasure about her, but it was so momentary that he could hardly be sure, but though she hid it from him she felt it surely enough; it roused up in her again all the angry feelings which had subsided a little since they had all met in London, and she set herself to watch most carefully to see if she could detect anything in the manner of either of the pair to confirm her suspicions.

They dined together one day, and had lunch together another, and met at the opera, besides one or two other meetings, but she detected nothing at all till one evening they were all at a large evening party, and she saw Wilfred take Lady Waldermere to have some tea, or something of that kind, and then giving her his arm, lead her away to where there was a small conservatory, which was not so crowded as the other rooms were. She was standing talking to a man, and after they had

been gone a minute she asked him to take her nearer the window as the room was so hot, and she then placed herself so that she could watch her two friends.

She could not hear what they were saying, and it might have been the most trivial and commonplace conversation in the world that was going on, but there was a look of intentness and earnestness on Wilfred's face, and an expression in his eyes that there could be no mistaking by one who knew so much of the life of the two. Lady Waldermere was not looking at him, and when she once or twice looked up at him as she was speaking, his face quite changed its expression, but her suspicious mind made her think that there was every sign in her of the most decided pleasure while listening to him, but nothing more to remark, so that she could not say what might be passing in the lady's heart. But about Wilfred there could be no doubt whatever; in his face she read most plainly every mark of the most passionate love. He evidently thought that no one could see him, as he glanced round every now and then, but could not see her through a mass of flowers, which she, being close to, could see through quite plainly.

When had he ever looked at her like that, she thought, during all the last year and through all the many hours they had passed together when he was saying such pretty and flattering things to her?—never once! And now, as she watched him, she seemed to read in him a depth which she had never before believed to be in him; clever and agreeable she had always thought him, and with something very caressing and lovable about him, but never had she believed that he possessed the intensity of feeling and passion that she now saw so plainly in his face. At that moment, unaccustomed as she was to put any restraint on her thoughts and desires, she felt a longing for his friendship—it might be for his love—that she had never felt before. And then came across her the feeling that that was impossible now, that it could never be hers. The next moment a rush of fierce hatred came over her; all the bitterness and anger of wounded pride and disappointed love flashed up in her, and she vowed within herself that sooner or later she would revenge herself on both of them. She did not yet know what Lady Waldermere might feel towards Wilfred, but that she would find out, and, after all, it did not much matter, as she

had been the means of taking from her the one man whom, as she now believed in her volatile heart, she could have really loved. If Lady Waldermere cared for him, her revenge would be all the greater and all the easier, but time would show her, and would do all she resolved on.

She put a strong restraint on herself; and though her companion was at a loss to know what made her turn so pale, and become so abstracted in her manner, there was nothing more visible than might be perfectly accounted for by fatigue, as she asked him to take her down to supper, and give her some champagne. She saw soon afterwards the two come into the supper-room, and she later on wished both of them good night with the same cordiality of manner that she had that morning greeted them with; and when, during the next two or three days, they casually met, nothing whatever in her manner betrayed that she hated them both so intensely. But much of them she did not have to see, as Lady Waldermere returned to Warwickshire, and Wilfred went down to stay with one of his brothers till he was to go to Waldermere Park for Whitsuntide.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT a contrast did Waldermere Park present to Wilfréd as he came to it on a most lovely day towards the end of May, to what it had been when he was there in dreary February. The country was in all the beauty of an early summer. East winds had blown themselves quite away, and the most delightful softness reigned over everything. The whole air seemed to be scented, and all the trees to be vying with each other in putting on their most beautiful dresses. The fields were one mass of gold with buttercups and cowslips, and the hedges a continual line of paler gold and blue with primroses and bluebells, while the trees were displaying every shade of the most brilliant emerald with their young leaves, which had not yet toned down to the more sombre tint of their summer dress. As he drove along, in

all the hedges and trees the birds were pouring out every note of rejoicing at the perfect beauty of the earth, and the view culminated as he came into the park, and passed by the grand old horse-chestnuts, with their stately leaves and magnificent flowers—the most beautiful trees in the world. The old thorns, with their loads of white blossom, looked as though winter snow still clung to them, to set off the brilliancy of the green spring grass; and far away the long lines of oaks and elms, in their fresh foliage, seemed worthy to be the out-works of the dwelling of some enchanter. Wilfred drank in the beauty and the charm of the scene most fully and deeply as he drove up the hill to the house, and found Flossy and little Hilda, who had been looking out for him, on the steps to welcome him, while Brebis fairly shrieked with delight as she jumped all over him to welcome her old friend. The pleasure of the children at seeing him had a real charm for him. He had known so little of the pleasures of domestic life, that the love of those little creatures was very sweet to him, with a sweetness which is often felt most deeply by men who have never had a little one to call them father, and which it is some-

times hard for those who have married young, and perhaps have more of them than they want, to understand. But Wilfred felt the keenest pleasure in taking his little friend Hilda up in his arms and smothering her with kisses.

He went with the children into the old hall, which was now fragrant with the faint perfume of flowers, its winter cheerfulness and warmth being exchanged for the freshness of spring flowers, in the arrangement of which the hand of the fair mistress of the house was everywhere to be traced.

"Mr. St. John," said his friend little Hilda, "mamma told me to tell you if you came before she was back that she would be in directly—she is out riding. Harry, you know, is at home for the holidays, and he is with her; and she says that perhaps I may have a ride with you, if you will take great care of me. I ride a pony now, and I am to gallop him soon. We mean to have such fun while you are here, and mamma says it will be such a blessing that we shall have no one to bother us."

"Is that part of her message to me, Hilda?" asked Wilfred, laughing.

"Well, no; she did not tell me to say it to you, but she said it," she answered.

“What are we to do to amuse ourselves?” he asked.

“We are to go on the lake one day, and we are to have tea on the top of the hill in the wood another day, and then we shall ride, and go and pick cowslips, and all sorts of things.”

Little Hilda went on chattering to him, with an occasional word put in by Flossy, till she suddenly exclaimed, “Oh! here they come,” and Wilfred saw Lady Waldermere and little Harry come cantering towards the house by the lime avenue, and in a minute or two they pulled up at the hall door.

What a pretty picture it was! Lady Waldermere, in her dark riding habit, which perfectly fitted her slight, graceful figure, with a Spanish hat and plume on her delicate little head. Her eyes sparkling with the enjoyment of riding through the lovely weather, and the beautiful colour in her cheeks slightly deepened by the exertion of her ride. She sat there on her dark chestnut horse, that arched his neck and pawed the ground, as though proud of his lovely rider, who seemed as perfectly at home as among the cushions of the most luxurious barouche, or in the middle of a circle of admirers in a ball-

room. By her side was Harry, with his bright curly hair, and large eyes, so like his mother's that they seemed hardly to belong to a boy. He was looking at her with an admiration so plainly expressed in his face—a love and admiration combined—that it seemed strange any mother could excite in the heart of a boy so young, but it was evident that he too shared to the full the adoration of his sisters for their beautiful mother. They were standing at the foot of the stone steps which led up to the old porch, the same old steps with their carved stone balustrade, and the same griffins on each side, that had looked on Queen Elizabeth dismounting from her horse, when the Waldermere of her day had the honour of receiving the great Queen for a night, on her journey to Kenilworth. The old house, with its mixture of brick and stone, grey with years, and partly covered with ivy, and the beautiful limes round it, looked down on the group from above, while on the steps stood the two children, the one tall and slight, with long hair waving over her shoulders, the other small and like a little fairy, with her great wonderful eyes, and clusters of soft brown curls; and between them sat the poodle, in her

crisp black coat, taking in the whole scene with the deepest interest, while two great peacocks, looking with majestic contempt on everything around them, stood a short distance from the group.

Wilfred ran down the steps to help Lady Waldermere from her horse, but she only gave him one little hand as she sprang lightly to the ground, and most warmly welcomed him to the beautiful shades of Waldermere.

“You were indeed right,” he said, “when you told me I should see the park in its summer beauty to know what it really was. I think it is the greenest and most lovely place I ever saw.”

“Yes,” she answered, “it really is beautiful; we may talk of the beauties of foreign countries, and they may be grander, but I think nothing on earth could be more perfectly lovely than this place in the first beauty of summer. But tell me,” she said, “have you brought any news from London, and have you seen the happy couple since their return to England? I hear they are on show now.”

“No,” he answered; “but I have had a letter from the lady in answer to mine of congratulation; it is so characteristic of her, it

amused me very much—she is the most naïve *enfant* that ever was.”

“But will make an excellent wife, don’t you think?” said she smiling. “You knew her rather well.”

“Oh! please, be merciful to me,” he said; “it was really too bad of you and Mrs. Addington to chaff me so pitilessly that day. I had no chance with two to one, and two such women.”

“Is the letter really amusing?” she asked. “I shall rather like to see it, if you have got it with you.”

“You shall see it directly,” he said; “I think I have it in my pocket, and I can give it you with a clear conscience, as there is no possible secret about it.”

They were now in the hall, and Wilfred took the letter of Mrs. Henderson, that was, out of his pocket and gave it to Lady Waldermere to read,—it was as follows:—

“My dear Mr. St. John,—I must thank you much for your kind letter and good wishes. I am sorry that you did not know of my marriage before the wedding, but I thought you were sure to have heard of it and I feel sure

you cannot have been much surprised, as you know what great friends I and Frank have been for years.

“He is, as you know, such a good creature, and kindness itself, and I feel quite confident that I have before me a most happy life with him. I now feel sure that he was not properly understood, and that the tongues of the world have been very unfair to him ; what they said, however, only amused him, and he persisted in making himself out much worse than he could possibly be.

“I find, what I have sometimes thought, that he has been devoted to me for a very long time, but was always afraid to tell me so, and I really do believe that I have the happiness to be the first woman he every really cared for in his life.

“If you see Hilda Waldermere, or Bessie Addington, you can tell them that I shall show them what a pattern wife is who never flirts, whatever she may have done before her marriage ! Indeed, I don’t feel that the merit in me will be very great with such a husband as Frank Digby, and of his continual attachment and devotion I feel quite confident. .

“You may be quiet sure, Mr. St. John, that

you will always find the warmest welcome at our house, and I hope we shall see a great deal of you, as much of you as I used to, and my husband feels the strongest friendship towards you, though, I think, he was a little inclined to be jealous of you, but that has departed, and for ever.

“We shall be in London for the season, and you will find us in the house in Eaton Square which my uncle left me.

“Yours very sincerely,

“ALICE DIGBY.”

“It is indeed characteristic of her,” said Lady Waldermere, “if faith can move mountains, I am sure the earth ought to be a dead plain wherever the dear Alice goes. It is delightful to come across such innocence. I only trust that her belief in her Frank may long continue. He is a very good fellow *au fond*, and he has had his fling with a vengeance. I am sure he has sown enough oats both wild and tame to empty any granary, so there is a very good chance for her, and if she is to his virtues very kind, I am sure she will be the other thing entirely.”

“I am amused,” said Wilfred, “at the little

dig she has at my admiration for her, and Frank's jealousy; how he would scream with laughter if he could hear that! But he will be a beast if he does not treat her well, she is such a good soul."

"Now, Mr. St. John," said Lady Waldermere, "don't you go talking in that tone about her, who, whatever you may say, I am sure was not so very far from being your wife, at any rate as far as the asking was concerned. But we will wish them joy and discuss them no more, at any rate till we have seen something of the *ménage*."

"Tell me what Sir Henry said about it," said Wilfred.

"Oh! he did not say much," she answered; "he remarked that it was a very good arrangement for the gentleman, and that he was of a very good old English family, and that, as the deceased uncle's money had been made in commerce, it was quite right it should come towards supporting the hereditary aristocracy of England, who have made her the great nation she is, and so on."

"But did he make no remark about their fitness for each other, or how they may get on?" he asked.

“Oh, no!” she answered, “I don’t think that that side in matrimony ever strikes him, he is very sensible about that, a husband is a husband, and a wife is a wife with him; but I must run up and take off my habit,” said she, “and we will have some tea if you like, though it is so late.”

She went upstairs and left Wilfred with the children, who, without being told, always took themselves to the other end of the room whenever their mother was talking to ~~any one~~, and when Lady Waldermere came down she found him on the sofa with little Hilda on the cushions by his head, and Flossy on a stool by him already deeply interested in a story. Harry came in very soon, having gone with the horses round to the stable, to have a final talk with his friend Wilson, the coachman.

“Mamma,” said little Hilda, “may I have a ride with Mr. St. John to-morrow? You said I might have a ride with some one who could quite take care of me, and I know he can.”

“He won’t want to be worried with a little girl to look after like you,” said Lady Waldermere.

“Oh yes, he will take me, he says he will if

you will let him," exclaimed the little child, "and he has been telling us a story of a little girl who was carried off by Indians, and who had learnt to ride so well that she took a horse and escaped all by herself, and I want to learn to ride well."

"Mamma," said Harry, "I am sure he could take care of her, Wilson says Mrs. Addington's coachman told him that Mr. St. John was the best rider he had seen across Northamptonshire for ever so long, and that he had learnt to ride wild horses when he was among the Indians. I do so want to see him ride."

"I am afraid you will be rather disappointed when you do, Master Harry," said Wilfred, laughing, "it will be very much like any other tailor outside a horse."

"But you did ride wild horses and escaped from Indians and all sort of things, didn't you?" asked the boy.

"Oh! we had a few adventures," said Wilfred, "but nothing very wonderful. I am afraid some one has been telling you more about my adventures than I know myself."

"But will you tell me some of them, please, by-and-by?" he asked.

"Oh! yes if you like," he answered, "when we have nothing better to do."

“And about the big snake, and the crocodile, and the poor dog, and all,” said little Hilda, “Oh, Harry! he tells such nice stories, and fairy stories too sometimes!”

As Wilfred sat among the cushions on the sofa, Lady Waldermere could not help thinking, as she watched him playing with her little Hilda, how little that rather indolent, almost effeminate-looking man, was like one who had wandered about so for years, who had really led such a life of adventure, had lived among Indians, and had fought with them and more than once narrowly escaped with his life, who had gone on the most reckless and hazardous expeditions simply for the pleasure of the excitement and danger,—the fearless and accomplished rider, and the steady shot whatever might be the game,—who was now idling about the drawing-rooms of pleasant houses, or spending his life in the whist room of a club. Interest in him she could not help taking, he was such a contrast to all the men she came across. Clever and ready, but indolent and apathetic to a degree when nothing aroused him; not really unscrupulous, but with ideas become lax from the careless life he had led and the great mixture of society

he had so familiarly associated with. Great powers for good in him if anything could bring them out, but now apparently quite lost to the world for want of some object to spur him to an effort. She could not help feeling sorry to see his life so wasted, but she felt a little that if he were more occupied in life, he would have neither the time nor perhaps the inclination to be such a pleasant companion. If he had been absorbed in some active profession, if his life had been one of constant work and constant occupation, he might have been of more use to the world, might perhaps have achieved greatness and fame, but though in his leisure hours, in those few hours which were taken from serious work for rest and relaxation he might have been most agreeable, most brilliant, there would have been lost the charm which even the feeling of regret to see talents wasted brings, more especially when those talents are laid at the feet of one person, and, instead of being employed to serve, perhaps to dazzle the world, are all exerted to please and serve that one. She did not stay, however, to inquire closely into what Wilfred was doing, or might do under other circumstances, all these things were rather felt than

realized. She was content now to accept him as a most charming companion, whom she had got all to herself for a week, and to enjoy his society accordingly.

Wilfred was far too much the domestic cat in the family for him to be treated as a visitor in any way; the servants all liked him, for he was considerate and liberal, and always most polite to all. In the nursery he was perfectly at home, and little Hilda's nurse regarded him nearly as much as a hero of romance as her little charge did.

That evening passed away smoothly and pleasantly, Sir Henry was in his usual state of solemn good temper, and was quite ready to be left to read and then go to sleep in an arm-chair after dinner, while Wilfred enjoyed once more the fascinating society of his hostess. She was in a brighter and gayer mood than he had seen her for a long time, and seemed to have drunk in the pleasure of living, with the lovely weather. She played to him a little, but it was more as an accompaniment to conversation than anything else; she touched the air of some waltz only to remind them of some pleasant ball, but they avoided every topic that

could be painful, and gave themselves up to the pleasure of being once more together.

Wilfred went to his room that night more than ever in love with Lady Waldermere, and his dreams were all of her alone.

The following day was spent almost entirely out of doors. They rode, they rambled about with the children and picked flowers, and Wilfred told them all wonderful stories of impossible adventures of the kind which lured the followers of Sir Walter Raleigh to unknown lands. The time passed so delightfully that they hardly knew the day was over when the shades of evening came, and then followed another delightful evening.

The next day Lady Waldermere said she felt a little tired, and would not go out, so she sent the children out and determined to spend the morning at home. Sir Henry had gone to a county meeting at a distance, and would not be back till late in the evening, so she was left alone with Wilfred.

They were sitting together in a small room on the ground floor, where she generally lived in the day time when alone. Everything in the room was redolent of herself, and each picture, each bit of china, and every piece of

furniture in it, brought to mind the presiding goddess. The view from the window was perfectly delightful; it looked on the terraced garden, with its deep shaded walk through the old yew-trees, away over the park with its herds of deer and its glorious old trees dotted about, over the lake and woods beyond it to the beautiful distant landscape. Green fields of grass and corn, with here and there the farmsteads looking so tiny in the distance,—the blue smoke curling up here and there among the trees, and farther away a cluster of houses, with their tall elms and poplars, and the old church spire or tower in the midst,—the little town, which looked soft and grey in the distance, with its canopy of blue vapour over it, making it look like an enchanted city, instead of a quiet country town; and away in the far distance the hills dim and misty in the glorious sunshine. Such a view as artists and poets love to dream of and to paint in soft verse or softer colours; and on this bright morning the two occupants of the room had been for long gazing at it from under the delightful shade of the Venetian blinds.

They had not talked much. Lady Waldermere had seemed tired, and to be suffering

rather from a fit of depression of spirits after her gaiety, and Wilfred, who had rather caught the feeling, could make no effort to amuse her.

“How strange it is,” she said “that one should feel so bright and happy one day, and the next be depressed for no cause whatever!”

“Yes,” he answered, “but I am not sure that it is entirely a painful feeling. I think it is rather as Longfellow so prettily expressed it,—

The feeling of sadness and longing that is not akin to
pain,

And resembles sorrow only as the mist resembles rain.
There is a feeling of melancholy that is almost
real pleasure.”

“But I am not fond of feeling depressed,” she answered. “I think we have quite enough worries in life to put us down, enough painful feelings in reality without being sad for imaginary woes.”

“Who that saw you, Lady Waldermere,” he said, “would suppose you could ever have had a sorrow in life, or even be cast down. You seem always the impersonification of brightness.”

“Do I?” she said. “Do I seem as though I had no feeling at all?” and she went on in

rather a sad voice, "I often wish I had been born without any."

"You! Lady Waldermere," he said, leaning a little towards her in the low chair where he was sitting near her. "You!" he repeated, "that you should know a moment's pain, and I should not be able to bear it for you!" and hardly knowing what he was doing, he took her little white hand, and pressed it to his burning lips,—he felt as though the earth was going from under him, and that he was acting almost unconsciously; but she showed no sign of anger, and did not immediately withdraw her hand; she only turned on him her great eyes, with a sweet sorrowful expression in them.

"Oh!" he went on, "I cannot bear to think that you should have one moment of sadness or sorrow when I am near. Oh! my love, how I adore you, worship you!" He hardly knew what he did then; but the next moment the slight form of his beautiful companion was clasped in his arms, and his lips were pressed to hers. For the briefest space did he feel the most unutterable happiness, a bliss, a sense of love confessed, love returned, and by one whom he worshipped with every

power of his soul and body, while she rested motionless with his arms pressed closely round her loved body,—the next moment she had torn herself from his clasp, and throwing herself half on the sofa, half on the ground, buried her face in the cushions. For a minute he stood by her lost in the confusion of contending emotions, and unable to move; then he threw himself on his knees by her, and pressing his lips once more to the little hand that was hanging loosely down, said in a low voice, quivering with emotion, “ Oh, Hilda ! can you forgive me ? you little know how utterly, how entirely I love you—I worship you ! ” .

Then, after waiting for nearly a minute, during which she showed no sign of any movement, he said,—

“ Oh ! for God’s sake, speak to me. I shall never forgive myself if I have given you any cause of pain or sorrow ! ”

She raised her white face from the cushion, with her eyes looking larger and more wonderful than ever before, and said, “ It is not you I have to forgive, it is myself ; ” and slowly, in a low voice, she went on, “ What must you think of me ! How you must despise me ! ”

“Think of you!” he exclaimed passionately. “Despise you! Oh! my love, I think of you as I have thought of you for months, only as dearer, and better, and more beautiful than ever before. God knows how I have loved you, and how I have determined and struggled never to let you know it! And now in one moment of weakness I have let you see it all! And you do not hate me for it? Now you know my secret—the great passion, the whole reality of my life is before you; now you know how I have presumed to worship the best, the most perfect woman I ever knew; to adore you, my queen, my goddess, the star that I gaze on from so far in the bright heavens. Oh, my own love! tell me that you will forgive me, that you will let me be near you as before, that if need be you will forget this madness! only speak to me!” he went on passionately, still on his knees, close beside her, while he was gazing with imploring eyes into the depths of hers.

Slowly she opened her lips as if she spoke with difficulty, and said to him, “Please leave me now for a little, my head is so confused I cannot speak. I will come out with you if I feel I can after luncheon. Please go till then.”

He once more for a moment touched her white hand, which was now icy cold, with his lips, and the next left the room, and scarcely knowing where he was going, took up his hat and went out into the beautiful sunshine, among the sweet-scented flowers, and wandering down the terrace, threw himself on a bench under an old yew-tree, with the butterflies fluttering round him, and the thrushes singing over his head, and away in the distance the cuckoo uttering its cheery note, as though all nature was peaceful and joyous and bright, to mock the tumult that was raging in his breast. He could see from where he was the window of the room which had lately been the scene of his so involuntary confession of his great love, and more, where he had learnt that the beautiful lady of his dreams looked without anger on it. But what other feeling had she? The whole scene in the room was still such a confused mist in his mind that he could make out nothing clear; but he felt over all a feeling, an idea, almost a conviction, that he was beloved by her. So unexpected was the idea, so little had he dreamed of it, that he could not realise it. At one time he seemed to grasp it, and another he put it from him as impos-

sible ; the absence of any anger with him might be the result of surprise, perhaps mixed with pity for his infatuation. But what could be the meaning of her words? He pondered long over them, and repeated them over and over again to himself, and then, in his imagination, he lived over again those brief moments, once more he felt her lovely form strained to his breast, and her sweet lips pressed to his. More madly in love with her than ever, he rose from the bench and wandered into the park, and under the shady lime avenue he paced up and down, to calm his mind for the interview with her that he looked forward to that afternoon.

Had he wished for, or had he dreaded, the scene he had just passed through? Had there been all along by the side of his resolution that he would keep the secret of his love to himself, a longing, unknown to him, that she should for one moment look into his heart, and see what a shrine he had built there for her dear image ! And had there, too, been a yearning after her sympathy, her pity, if for no more? He could not say, he could not calmly analyse his feelings. At one moment there came over him a flood of the most intense pleasure, a

depth of happiness that seemed to fill his whole being, at the thought that one whom he so admired, so loved, had so exalted to the highest pitch to which man could raise and idealise woman, should really feel for him, perhaps love him! The very dream that love so deep and intense, yet mingled with so much respect, so much of the feeling of humble adoration, could be returned by a being so divine was too sweet, too delicious, and seemed impossible, yet how soft, how delightful it was to dwell upon! For long, as he walked slowly up and down under the sweet limes, with the soothing hum of innumerable bees round the soft leaves, he dwelt in the delights of the present, but gradually he had to steady his ideas, and to remember that there was a future, and that that future must be lived through? Then by turns he longed for and dreaded his next meeting with Lady Waldermere; how would she meet him? would she still pardon his moment of madness, or would she be cold and distant, and again veil herself in that impenetrable manner she knew so well how to assume? Then even if she did sympathise with him, did love him, what must be the struggle in her mind between love and duty. She in whom he

had always seen such a high sense of duty, who though surrounded by admirers had kept herself so uncontaminated by the world, and had learnt so little of the easy maxims and easy morality of fashionable life; if she now really cared for him, he could not but feel with what a struggle she must have admitted it, and to what a cost to her feeling of duty!

But if she did care for him, if she did love him one quarter as well as he did her, what was their future life to be? Must he tear himself away! must he leave her presence just as it seemed to open a new heaven upon earth to him? Or could he stay near her, to grow to love her more and more, and to live only in her presence? How should he decide? But why should he decide at all? Why not wait first to learn what she thought, what she felt, and then decide, or rather leave everything to take its own course, and let the future take care of itself?

He was thinking over all this, and though still much confused in his mind by the events of the morning, was more able to command himself when he heard the bell ring for luncheon. He walked back to the house, and to the dining-room where he found Lady Walder-

mere already with the three children. He came in and took his place, hardly venturing to look at her, while little Hilda supplied all the conversation by an account of what they had been doing that morning, and an argument with her brother and sister upon the question of whether Brebis had a soul or not, and whether she would go to heaven when she died if she were good. She appealed to Wilfred, who could not resist saying something about the transmigration of souls, but his thoughts were far away, and he from time to time stole a look at Lady Waldermere, who did not speak except a word or two to the children, yet showed no sign of past agitation unless it was that she looked pale, and had a worn expression about her beautiful eyes.

The meal was over at last, and the children wanted to know what they were going to do. Lady Waldermere told them she was not well enough to go out with them, but that Wilson would take them out in the pony-carriage, and that they might come in to tea; she then said to Wilfred as she was leaving the room, "If you like to come out with me a little way in the park, I shall be ready in half an hour;" he made her a low bow as she passed him, saying

some words of acquiescence in an inaudible voice. Little Hilda seized upon him, and made him take Brebis through all her performances, which the prospect of tit-bits from the luncheon-table made her do with redoubled energy. She walked on her hind legs, jumped on them, turned head over heels, and did steeple-chase round the large dining-room over the chairs with a vigour which only a poodle can show, and then she had to express her love for Lady Waldermere over and over again. "Ah, Brebis!" thought Wilfred, "if you only knew how little persuasion it has wanted to make some one else tell his love for that fair lady, you would be ashamed of wanting a bit of cake for doing it!" But at last the pony-carriage came round to the door, and the children departed with Brebis barking fiercely behind, and in a few minutes Lady Waldermere came down the stairs into the hall.

She was dressed in a light summer dress, with a wide shady straw hat on her head, whose coils of silky brown hair were wound tightly round, and she had a bright coloured soft shawl thrown loosely over her shoulders. Wilfred watched her as she came down; and in her light dress, with her lithe graceful

figure, she looked more like a girl of seventeen than a woman of nearly thirty.

“Will you bring out a plaid,” she said. “We will walk a little way, and then sit down in the park, it is so warm this afternoon.”

They walked on in silence for some way, till she pointed to some trees which over-looked a long slope covered with fern, among which some hinds were feeding with their fawns playing about round them. “There,” she said, “we will rest under that shady tree; it is very quiet there, and there is from it such a pretty view which I am so fond of.”

In a few minutes he had spread a plaid and shawl for her, and was himself lying at her feet among the fresh green young brackens.

For a short time neither of them broke the silence, and then Wilfred spoke, looking up into her face with an entreating expression.

“Lady Waldermere,” he said, “I scarcely know how to ask you to forgive my madness of this morning. I cannot tell what made me so lose my self-control as to let you know a secret I meant to keep from you always. But you know it now, and I cannot unsay it. It is true; I love you,—yes I love you with all the power, all the devotion of my life, my

soul, my body. Oh! how could I help it! seeing you as I have? But I thought I could be with you, be near you, and lie ever under your charm, yet never betray myself. Tell me at least that you are not angry with me!"

"No," she answered, looking softly at him, and speaking in a sad tone of voice, "I am not angry with you, I am only distressed. I had half dreaded this for some time, but I could not resist the temptation to ask you down here now. You must know that I do like you very much, too much, I fear," she said half to herself, and then she continued, "I could not help seeing for a long time that you were growing to care very much for me, but it was very sweet to feel it, and I could not summon up the courage to send you away. But I never realized that you would ever tell me of your love. I thought that we might go on always as dear and intimate friends, but that no word of love need ever pass between us. Yet I ought to have known human nature better; and now all this has happened, I don't know if I am glad or sorry; the knowledge of your love for me is so sweet that I cannot feel its wrongness, and put it from me as I should."

"Why should you put it from you?" he

said in a low voice while his eyes sought to fathom the depths of hers half hid by their long drooping lashes. Why must you cast out what may be so deep a pleasure to you, and a source of unutterable joy to me? Is it unnatural that I should love you, and you care for me! Why need any harm ensue from it? I am not going to talk of being your brother, or speak platitudes of any sort, but,—Oh, Hilda! oh, my own dear love! why may I not go through life as your very dear friend, as one who can help you, if ever the time came, in any difficulty, admire and wonder at your purity and goodness, and watch over you and your children as the dearest things on earth to him! Do you think I shall not have sufficient self-control to save you from ever regretting that you may have put all your confidence in me?"

"You seem to forget," she said speaking very slowly, "that I am married, and you are not. I have not only myself to consider, I have my children, my mother, and," she added almost inaudibly, "my husband. You know the world too well for there to be any need of my telling you what it would say, should its busy eyes and ears once imagine you cared for me so

much,—and I allowed it,—accepted it. I don't say it need ever know, but you know what the result would be, and I should die of shame if there were once any suspicion in that world of my fair fame. I care for my own sake much, very much, but far more for my children; how can I bear to risk handing down to them any taint of dishonour? Alas! I know I ought to talk to you of duty, of the faith I owe to my husband, not only in deed but in thought and word,—but I know not how to; it is to me so very sweet to feel your great love for me. You little know how much through the years that I have lived, surrounded by flatterers and admirers, I have longed for some one to love me truly and really, some one whose love I could believe in, and rest and repose on. And shall I tell you?—I do believe in yours. Shall I tell you something of my life? I who have never talked before of myself,—really of myself,—to any living being? Yes,” she went on, “I will speak now. I have told you of my early days, and you know pretty well what my life has been as the world has seen it, but neither you nor any one else knows what my inner life has been. I married when almost a child. I scarcely

knew why, except that the match pleased my mother very much. There were rank and fortune, and I should have been very poor, for when my brother died all my father's property, which was entailed, went to his own family, and he was able to make but a small settlement on my mother; and her family, as you know, were ruined in that unhappy war. My marriage would help her, and there was every reason for it. I was so young that I scarcely knew the difference between one man and another. I had never cared for any one in my life. I did not know what marriage meant. I was of the most buoyant happy disposition, with the highest spirits and very fond of any amusement. I was, though I say it of myself, very pretty and I had many admirers, and it amused me very much to see them round me; and my marriage to a rich man of good old family seemed to me no bar to my spending a very merry life as I viewed it then. My mother knew my wild spirits and my impatience of control, and, I think, felt that I was a dreadful care to her, and she thought that if I were married to a man like Sir Henry, I should soon steady myself, and there would be no risk of my perhaps making

a foolish marriage, which she would be unable to prevent. I did not see why I should not marry him, so I did. I cannot say I was unhappy in those early days of marriage, but happy I was not; only I don't think that it ever struck me to think why. I was so young that I thought that probably there was more that was unpleasant than pleasant in any husband, and I looked upon it as rather a necessary evil that must be borne with. We have lived together now, as you know, for years. I have tried to be a good wife, I have tried hard to love him; yes! I have indeed tried very hard. I have been the mother of his children. I have been constantly with him, but I have never been his companion or he mine. We have never had two thoughts, two ideas in common. I know that I seem to have all that makes life enjoyable. I cannot say that he has ever been unkind to me; I sometimes wish to heaven that he had! I think that there would then have been more chance of my loving him, but he gives me money,—anything I can want that it can bring,—and he is always courteous and polite to me, and—and—I am his wife. He thinks that jewels and fine clothes should buy my love! Ah! how little do women

who sigh so for them, and think they could give their heart for them, know what they would be doing! Their body they may sell; their heart never! Oh! Mr. St. John, why do I tell you all this! Why do I open my heart like this! I don't know,—but you cannot dream what a relief it is to me to pour out at last all that has been burning in me for years. For years that I have longed so for some one to love, for some loving heart on which I could pour out all my own. I have tried so hard to resist temptation since I have known you, and since I first saw how you liked me, and felt how sweet it was! I have tried hard to escape! When in Scotland I found I was learning to care too much for you, I tried to tear myself away; I almost hoped that your feelings would have been enough hurt; that jealousy for my preference of Sir Percy might have driven you away; and when you were gone, I believed that we could meet again in London safely enough. Then came the evening when you hurt your foot, and I could not resist the temptation to have you in my house, under my own roof, to see you every day,—perhaps if I had had time to consider, I might have done otherwise, but the temptation that night

came on me so suddenly I could not resist it. I hardly know if I tried. After that I let the world go on, and I was happy. Yes ; I dare now to confess to you that I was very happy those three weeks when you were with me. And then we met again and again, and I believed it possible we could go on, and that no word, no mutual confession would ever come between us. But now it has come, and it is too sweet, too delightful. I know not if I shall ever speak to you again like this, but speak now I must," and she went on, blushing deeply and looking down into the green brackens ; "it is too ineffably sweet, too great happiness, to know, after my long years of barren life, I am loved so dearly and truly, and," she added almost in a whisper, "by you !"

To describe what Wilfred's feelings were through all the time she had been speaking would be impossible, such a whirl there was in his mind, of joy to know she loved him so much ! of deep sympathy with her, of despair to feel that possibilities of happiness were impossibilities, and, over all, such a flood of intense brightness seemed to fill the world ! And around them all the time

was the glorious sunshine and the soft warm breath of early summer. The birds singing in the trees above them, and the hinds nibbling the young shoots, and feeding nearer and nearer to them as though attracted by her soft voice, while the fawns played around, and would from time to time come in a string towards them, curious to examine them with their great soft eyes, and suddenly springing round, bound away half in fear and half in play.

He was silent for a few moments after she ceased speaking, and then he said in a low earnest voice, "Oh, Hilda! how can I ever show my love for 'you? my great gratitude to you for your sweet confidence in me? how can I ever show myself worthy of it! What am I that you should have singled me out of all men to be made so happy with your love, to know the story of your dear life! I fear I can never really deserve it. But if the devotion of a life to you at least can show you how I shall try to make myself in some poor way more worthy of it, future years will let you see how true, how faithful I can be. All I shall pray for is to see you now and then, to look from time to time on your lovely, your so dearly

loved face, to heart the sound of your sweet voice, and to let you know that there is in the world one heart which only beats for you, one mind whose thoughts by day, whose dreams by night, are of you, and only of you ! And, for the rest, — though when far from you the world will seem a blank, those long and dark hours will be fully repaid by the happy moments I may pass near to you, and may you in future years never have for one moment to reproach me, or to regret that you have learnt the story of my love. But, oh ! Hilda, do not send me away from you. Only trust me ! ”

“ What can I say ? ” she answered ; “ I know I ought to say we must part, but it is hard to do. It is like, after having one glimpse into paradise, shutting the door of it again against one’s own self. Can I do it ? I feel so weak, yet I know only too well that I shall go on caring more and more for you, if I let you be continually near me, yet how am I to send you away ? I cannot ! I cannot ! Indeed I cannot ! ”

“ And why should you ? ” said Wilfred, “ we cannot live our lives twice. I do not believe that we can be really so intensely happy twice in our lives ; why put great

happiness from ourselves when we have it, when it can harm no one! Hilda, my own love, let us have faith in the future, let us have trust in one another, the cold hard world cannot see into our hearts, it cannot know our lives, or our deep love. For, as the thought of you will be elevating, ennobling, it may be that raised by your love, and by your example, I may exert myself, I may labour to show you that I have it in me to make myself a name in the world, and that you will not have to say that you have thrown away your love on an utterly unworthy object."

"I feel," she answered, "that I cannot struggle against my fate; I must let myself be carried on by a tide that is too strong for me to resist. And, after all, what have I to reproach myself with? In giving my love to you, I have robbed my husband of nothing. He never had it, never could have it, and it is indeed hard to feel such an intense power of loving, such a longing for love and sympathy, and to go through life like a barren waste, and never find one green bright spot in it! No! I cannot. Wilfred, I must trust to you." And she held out to him her little hand which he bent his head over and kissed passionately.

“May I only have the power to show you that your trust will not be in vain,” he answered in a low voice, which the tumult of his feelings made it hard for him to control.

Little more was said between them for some time, but gradually the power of conversation returned again to them, and though the world seemed changed to them, though they seemed to be the same to each other, and yet in some strange way different, the old pleasant habit of intercourse, of talking and speculating on ~~any~~ sort of subject came back again, but it had in it a charm, an interest, never felt before; there was now such a delight in finding so many subjects in common, to find that they agreed in so many different things, and the time passed on so smoothly, so delightfully under the trees, that they took no note of it.

Lady Waldermere was still sitting on her shawls and plaids, and leaning against an old elm-tree, and Wilfred was lying at her feet looking up into her face, when suddenly a black woolly object rushed in between them, and pushed its cold nose into Wilfred's face, and showed every desire to claim its share of his kisses.

“Holloa, Brebis,” he cried, “you turned up !

We have the enchanted hound, the fairy queen can't be far off," and the poodle was followed almost immediately by little Hilda, who arrived panting for breath, and threw herself down on the plaid by her mother, seized her hand and devoured it with kisses.

"Oh! mamma, you darling! I have found you at last. I thought you were never coming to tea, so I told Brebis to find you, and she soon set to work and brought me here, but she came so fast I could hardly keep in sight of her."

"My dear Hilda, are you going to pull me in pieces?" said her mother, laughing brightly at her impetuous haste.

"No, mamma, only it is always so nice to see you again, you dear!" she said holding her mother's hand in both hers, and nestling her head on her lap.

Wilfred watched the two with a feeling of intense pleasure, the devotion of this little creature to her mother told better what she was like than any words could, and as he looked affectionately at Lady Waldermere, he said, "It is so nice to see you can still laugh so brightly, after all our serious talk."

"It is my nature," she answered. "I believe

I should laugh in my coffin if they did anything absurd in the last solemn performance around me. What will you? we cannot be always gloomy?"

They sat there a little longer till little Hilda had quite recovered her breath, and till the shadows were growing long about them. Then Lady Waldermere rose, and Wilfred gathered up shawls and plaids, and they walked towards the house; but they had not gone far when they both stopped, and ~~took~~ one more look at the spot that they would both remember so well for the rest of their lives, and at the fair view it commanded of the glades of the park, and the beautiful distance of field, wood, and water, cattle and sheep dotted in distant meadows, and the dim far-off villages and church spires, with the rays of the setting sun tingeing them all with gold among their deep setting of dark shadows. For one minute they gazed on the lovely scene, then their eyes met in a long loving look in which deep trust, deep love, and calm happiness were mingled, and they turned and walked towards the house.

Though all inwardly was so changed to the two, yet the world went on just as it had done

the day before and many days before that. Sir Henry returned in time for a late dinner, and the evening passed just as usual; but the whole seemed to be changed to the two people in the house to whom that day had been the most eventful in their lives, one which was to change the colours of them entirely, which had disclosed to each of them so delightful, yet so dangerous a secret, and forged a link between them which both believed would never be broken.

It seemed difficult to think that Sir Henry, as he sat at the end of the table and talked country politics, could see no change in them; that John and James as they handed round the dishes did not detect some alteration in their manner, or that the solemn butler, as he filled up their glasses with a stateliness worthy of his master, could not observe that they were so much altered. But everything went on in just the same way as any other evening, and the slight embarrassment which they felt at the beginning of it soon entirely disappeared. They were neither of them children to wear all their feelings upon their faces; Wilfred had lived such a life of change and excitement, that it was impossible to read any emotions

on his pale face, and Lady Waldermere had for years trained herself to conceal every thought and every feeling deep in her own heart.

The evening passed away to all appearance in just the same way as either of the two preceding ones, but if they had been perfectly delightful, how much more so was this ! when there was an untold sympathy between the two in every word they spoke, and in everything they did. Their first fears, doubts, and misgivings had passed away, and no new ones had yet taken their places. But at last it came to an end, at last they must part, each with their heart full of a great love, and as Wilfred bowed low over the small hand which he pressed in his, he felt a longing to fall on his knees before her, and once more tell that beautiful woman how he loved and adored her. Sir Henry soon left him, and he, feeling it impossible to go to bed, opened the garden door to go out and wander in the beautiful moonlight.

The scene had been lovely by the bright light of day, but how fair, how calm it looked by the clear cold light of the moon ! The dark irregular outline of the old house which

looked gigantic and mysterious in its gloom ; the terraces, with their white stone parapets, looking by that light as though fresh sprinkled with snow, while close by them were the thick yews which were robed in the deepest black, and the walks under them were shrouded in impenetrable darkness. The valley below seemed to be of unfathomable depth, bathed in its flood of silvery mist, while the woods rose dark beyond it, and away over the park the grand old trees stood out singly sharp and clear in the brilliant light. The scent of roses and syringa was heavy in the still air as Wilfred walked slowly down the broad terrace, and the silence was only broken by a solitary nightingale singing to his mate, or the hoarse far-off call of the landrall in the long dewy grass of the meadows.

Along the terrace he walked, through the gardens and away into the dewy park, and hardly heeding where his steps were carrying him, he found himself, as though impelled by some instinct, at the spot where he had passed so many happy hours that afternoon. Wrapped in his rough stalking coat, he threw himself on the ground where had rested the loved form of Hilda Waldermere, and passionately he pressed

his lips against the hard rough bark of the old elm that had supported her beautiful little head. There he lay hour after hour, living over again in his mind the scenes of the past day, and gradually wandering in thought far away back ; to all his life since he first knew her, to their first acquaintance, to his going to her house, their party on the river, all their numerous meetings afterwards, the journey to Scotland, and the first happy week there, his misgivings about her, his jealousy of Sir Percy Fitzroy, and his rage with himself ; then his accident and life in Park Lane, his visit to Kirthorpe and all the cruel hints that Mrs. Addington had thrown out about her ; then his first visit to the Park, and now, last and chiefest of all, the wonderful events of the past day. How clear much of the past which had so perplexed him was to him now ; but in his wildest moments he had never dared to hope that she, whom he had raised to such a height, could ever look on him with love, and now he knew that she loved him. It was strange that the thought that she was married weighed so little on his mind, but he had always placed her so far above other women that the idea of loving her, of making love to

her, as the phrase goes, as a man in the ordinary course of life does to the young woman he wants to marry, never occurred to him. She was to him an ideal, a divinity more than a woman, his feeling towards her had been so different to any that he had felt in his varied career for any other woman, that her being married or unmarried seemed to have nothing to do with the matter; it was so before he ever dreamed of her caring for him, and it was so still. He had never viewed her as one who could be nearer to him than an object for his admiration and love; and now that he knew that she did return his love, he was no nearer doing so. It was impossible but that ever and again there would flash across his mind what life must be with such a being for a constant companion, guide, and guardian angel ever near; but such dreams did not remain, and he could not bring himself to see that he was in any way behaving dishonourably to Sir Henry in taking what never was his for one moment,—the real love of his wife. He was even sorry at moments for a man, who, with such happiness within his grasp, had been quite unable to see it, or to strive for it. He felt that Sir Henry was one of those men

who would call all higher ideas of love, all the greatest and noblest workings of the heart, all that really raises the love of man above the animal passion of the brute, mere sentimental nonsense. That he, like so many men, would consider anything connected with the love between man and woman, which was so intimate, so close, and yet so refined that he could not understand it, to be absurd, and to exist only in the brain of what he would call poetical idiots. But if there were moments when he was almost sorry for the husband's incapacity to value the treasure which the charm of a great fortune, and a long line of ancestors had given him, what did he not feel for the wife who was hopelessly tied for life to a man she could not love, and whose intellect she could but despise! She, so immeasurably his superior, with a nature the most delicate and most refined, to be his possession, to be a part of him, subject to every caprice of his will and pleasure, with no power of complaining or resisting! What slavery could be more trying, more melancholy, at times more revolting! And through it all to have to bear a happy and contented smile before the world, because he, forsooth, was kind

to her, and bought her plenty of pretty clothes and jewels! like the Grand Turk for the last odalisque bought for him in the market by the chief eunuch of the harem! But as these thoughts rushed through his heated brain, he roused himself up and cooled his burning head in the cold dewy grass, and gradually swept them from his mind. Then as he grew calmer, his thoughts wandered back to his past life, to the days of his boyhood and early manhood. How he wished that he had led a different life, and had made himself more worthy to be the chosen, the dearest friend of such a woman! And back there came to him all the idleness, the recklessness of those days. The mixture of the love of excitement, the restless longing to know everything of what the world calls the enjoyment of life, to taste of every pleasure and try every phase of it possible, and along with it a great desire for the better and nobler pursuits and aims of life. A great vein of hero worship, an enthusiastic but undefined wish to do something great, some act of self-sacrifice, had been his in youth. Then a deep feeling of disappointment in everything, a sense of the emptiness and unsatisfyingness of everything, a feeling of disgust against man

and woman; the former so selfish and narrow minded, the latter so frivolous and not worth the pursuit of,—a feeling that deepened so much as to drive him to wander round the world in search of a healthier tone of mind. And along with all this, from time to time, a great struggle in his mind on religious questions, at one time possessed with a paroxysm of devotion, at another doubting everything; how often he had passed days and nights of misery, and he remembered how he had prayed so earnestly for some special light to guide him, and how all these feelings had calmed down as life went on, and how in the excitement of years of a wild and adventurous life he had found rest for his troubled spirit, till he had arrived at a sort of indifference on almost every subject. He had come to believe men were not wholly so selfish, so incapable of nobleness and self-devotion as he had once thought, and that there were among women many who were far from frivolous and unworthy, but who were on the contrary noble and high-minded, yet he viewed all with an almost cynical indifference, amusing himself with the society of both, but never attaching himself very much to any one of either. And so he had gone on

up to the present time, with a feeling now and then that there were powers in him that were worthy of a better employment, but never seeing any reason for making the exertion of bringing them into play. But now the moment had come when he felt what a useless creature he had become, and when he longed to do something in life to show that she, who had so honoured him with her dear love, had not thrown it away on a worthless object, and gradually he felt this feeling raising his ambition once more, exciting in him higher and nobler thoughts of life, and ere he left the old tree, this love in him, this love for one who was married,—who was the wife of his host,—instead of awaking in his mind all that was low and selfish and base,—exalting his soul, and creating in him a longing to raise himself up to a level in goodness and purity with her, whom he loved with such devotion.

The first grey streaks of morning were painting the sky when he rose from the ground, his coat wet and heavy with the dew, and turned his steps towards the house; as he walked up the terrace the last stars were struggling with the rosy glow of dawn, and he looked up at the window of Lady Waldermere

with its masses of flowers round it, the words of Longfellow's serenade in the 'Spanish Student' occurring vividly to him :

Stars of the summer night !
Far in your azure deeps,
Hide, hide your golden light !
She sleeps !
My lady sleeps !

Dreams of the summer night !
Tell her, her lover keeps
Watch ! while in slumbers light
She sleeps !
My lady sleeps !

"She sleeps," he thought,—“may she ever be happy, be blessed in her sleep and in her waking ! and may no deed of mine ever for one moment give her a painful thought by day, or a sleepless hour by night ! ”

And that fair lady. What a strange confusion of thoughts was in her mind as she went from the drawing-room to her own room, in one corner of which slept the little Hilda ! Long did she gaze on the tranquil sleep of the little child that was so dear to her, and when she left the bedside, though there were tears in her eyes, her heart felt at peace. Then, as she could not sleep and her thoughts wandered

to the solitary watcher who was now among the dewy brackens in the park, she like him watched the beautiful landscape bathed in the soft moonlight, and she long mused on what her life was, and what it might be ! At last she rose with a deep sigh, and murmured to herself,

“ It is in vain ! All in vain ! Ah ! that one should long for such happiness, and all in vain ! ” Once more she went to the bed of the sleeping child, lifted her softly in her arms, and placed her sleeping still by her side, feeling that she had there something always with her to love and to cling to, as long as she had the sweet child whom she loved so very dearly.

CHAPTER III.

THE following morning Wilfred, though he had passed so great a part of the night out of doors, was down early. He could not sleep, and nights of watching in the open air were no new thing to him, so he was in the garden some time before any one else appeared. His only companion there was Brebis, whose respectable ideas had been much put out at the disgraceful hour at which he came to bed, and who was now lying on the most comfortable of the garden chairs, blinking in the sunlight at the peacocks who were strutting majestically up and down to wait the time till they should receive the usual attention of scraps of bread from the children. Presently little Hilda arrived with her short wavy curls glistening in the sunlight, and after first bestowing her morning salutation to the black forehead of

her woolly friend, seized upon Wilfred and was soon on his shoulder, making the journey round the terraces till breakfast time.

Lady Waldermere came down a little late, looking rather pale and fatigued with her late watching in the past night, and as she wished good morning to Wilfred, and looked in his face still paler than usual, she could see that he too had not spent all the hours of the night in slumber. Sir Henry was still full of his meeting of the day before, and of a report of the possible dissolution of Parliament, and was waiting with impatience for the morning papers. Wilfred talked to him almost mechanically of the exciting politics of the day, of the atrocious conduct of the radicals, and how there was nobody but the old Tory party to save the country from going to the dogs. He was generally amused at the ultra-conservatism of Sir Henry, who had never in his mind been able to conceive that it was possible a strong liberal could be an honest man. Wilfred, on the other hand, had been first brought up to believe in the old church and state Tory ideas, and had then become rather a liberal of the Charles Kingsley school; but his ideas of liberty and the advancement of the people had

received some rude shocks by the despotism and lawlessness of the mob, which he had witnessed in some of the experimental Republics he had visited, and he was now rather a Gallio on most subjects of politics. This morning he found it rather hard to keep his attention sufficiently on what the baronet was saying to be able not to answer, but to acquiesce and to amuse himself as usual by going even further than he, in his almost retrograde ideas. His whole attention was taken up with the pale lady in the light dress who was occupied with her tea-things, and with administering to the wants of the two small creatures on each side of her, while master Harry was filling himself as only a boy fresh from school can, who is let loose at a table covered with all the delicacies that can delight the heart and palate of a boy. Sir Henry sat at the other end of the table, an aristocratic, well-preserved man on the shady side of five-and-fifty. He looked so stately and so unapproachably correct in his pale blue and white neckcloth, which encircled his throat in its innumerable folds, his face most scrupulously shaved all but the small mutton-chop whiskers of the Regency period, a black frock coat,—Sir Henry never put on the un-

dignified shooting jacket of modern life,—and his feet in carefully varnished boots, that he seemed a most proper representative of the line of those solemn-looking ancestors, who in their full-bottomed periwigs and powder, with immense red waistcoats trimmed with gold down to their knees, looked down complacently from the dark oak panelling on the breakfast-table, and who bore such a striking family likeness to their neighbours in the hall, as must have been most gratifying alike to parent and descendant after the life in the circles of fashion, and the dissipations of a dissolute court, which so many of them had passed through.

Breakfast was over at last, and the children were feeding the peacocks at the window, where they were proudly showing off in the bright sun their brilliant tails in all the glory of fresh summer plumage. Sir Henry left them to go about his daily occupation, and to study the London papers, and Wilfred could say a few words to Lady Waldermere. Few they were, but those few reassured him that the remembrance of yesterday had left no painful impression on her mind; and when he asked her how they could pass the day together,

she proposed a ride that morning, for the weather was so perfect, while little Hilda went into ecstasies to hear that she might come too on her pony, and such was her hurry to rush off and get ready that Brebis missed almost the whole of her postprandial performances. Sir Henry declined to accompany them as he was busy, but said he might join them before lunch as he should be riding with his bailiff about the park.

Most delightful was their ride, along the shady avenues of the park, and through the flowery woods in all their first beauty of summer foliage. Too delightful it seemed, and two of the party could not help thinking that if life could be all like that, there would be little need of promising a place of greater happiness. Too well each of them knew the cold waste of the world that was outside of them, into which both must plunge again all too soon, and both were bent on shutting out all thought of it, and enjoying the present moment to the uttermost. That day passed all too quickly, and the succeeding days, and each day and each hour that they were together the two found that the more they saw of each other, the more intimately they understood each one

the life and thoughts of the other, the closer became the tie between them, and the dearer each was to the other. It was not with them, as with so many in the world, that the love which united them was merely some passing fancy or caprice, or only a transient passion; it was a confidence in one another, in their mutual tastes, their mutual ideas of all that makes life noble and pure and refined, but at the same time that makes it bright and pleasant. The same power to be amused, to see the absurd, ridiculous side of any question or person, and a feeling that any sentiment or opinion expressed to the other would be understood, and most probably agreed in. It was their intellectual companionship that added such a charm to their life together, and made their intercourse frequently like that of intimate friends between whom there has never been any thought, much less word, of love. And so things went on till the last day of his visit at the park. Though their lives had grown so much closer to each other, and though every look and every word was invested with a charm that it never had before, yet neither of them had in actual words alluded again to the scene when the inner life of

each was made known to the other. This life of close intimacy and confidence had grown quite natural to them, and to live thus closely bound together seemed so simple a thing that there was in it no feeling of living in a state of deceit, or of having any secret between them but what was so bound up in their lives, that to hide it from the world was not an act of deceit or concealment in a sense of reproach, but the instinct of any sensitive and refined mind which shrinks from letting the hard sneering world into the shrine where all its values and reverences is stored.

They were sitting together on the afternoon of the last day of his stay, and had been having tea on the terrace, as it chanced, under the very yew-tree where he had thrown himself on the bench after he had left that room in which he had so unveiled his heart to Lady Waldermere only a week before. But he was not now stretched on the hard bench, with his head in wild confusion, and a doubt and fear of what the future was to be distracting his mind; he was sitting in a low cushioned wicker-chair close by her, so near that he could feel from time to time the touch of her dress, and he was filled with the magic charm of her pre-

sence. His eyes* wandered to the window of the small sitting-room that he would remember so well, as long as his soul possessed the power of consciousness, and his thoughts took him back to that day and that scene. It was but such a short time ago, and was still so vividly before him, yet it seemed as though years had intervened since then, and as he looked at his beautiful companion sitting so calmly by him, and thought of the past days of quiet companionship they had so enjoyed, it was difficult to believe in the passionate scenes of those few minutes.

“A penny for your ‘thoughts,’” she said playfully; “you look like the sheep who dreams; what can it be about, that it brings that glum look on your long face?”

“I did not feel the glum look or the lengthening of my face,” he answered, “but, like the poet who sang the lay of Sir Lancelot Bogle, ‘my thoughts went wandering back, on a very beaten track, to the confine,’—well, I won’t say ‘deep and black,’ but rather solemn, of that small room there, and to a certain morning not more than a week ago; and I was wondering whether a certain lady,—now that the time of this my delightful sojourn

here is all but over,—looks back on that day with pleasure, or what her feelings on the matter may be ? ” .

As he spoke her face too grew serious, and she said to him, looking very earnestly at him, “Do you think that she too never thinks of that morning ? Do you in your inmost heart think that with pleasure she looks back on it, or with the reverse ? ”

“I hardly dare to think,” he replied. “I can only trust that it is not with pain,” and he went on in a soft low voice, “Hilda, my own Hilda, I in my inmost heart believe that you too felt the delight of that unlooked, for moment. I have since then grown so used to seeing you every hour of the day, and to knowing you were so near me at night, that I have not thought of our parting, but, alas ! now the time has come, and I am thinking what it will be to live without you.”

“It will be sad and hard,” she said, “but in spirit we need not part. Why need we be farther apart in all that is higher and nobler in us than we are now, because space may separate our bodies ? Our powers of mental feeling are not measured by the sight of our eyes, or the touch of our hands, and I believe

that those who truly love, who are truly united heart to heart and soul to soul, never part. Does this seem strange to you? I know not if it does, but I scarcely believe that you can altogether not understand it, and that you too believe that there is in us a higher and a greater power than these gross senses that we can test, and call by their familiar names,—a power, not superhuman, because common to all who can raise their minds so high, but which can traverse time and space, and I believe that though thousands of miles intervene between the material part of us, yet spiritually we can be companions, and commune with those whom we love devotedly and entirely.”

“I do understand what you mean,” he answered, “and I feel I have often felt that there are in us powers which we are dimly and indistinctly conscious of. Powers which we believe in, that is, which a few of us believe in, but which we cannot describe or define, and on which it is vain to speculate ; but I have often felt that distance can have nothing to do with real sympathy, real communion of soul. And,” he added, “my so dearly loved friend, if ever a love which absorbed every power, every faculty

of mind and body could call out this power, I feel that it is now in me. When we have been parted during these last few days, though by so short a space and for so short a time, I have felt as though your sweet spirit was ever hovering near me. Why, then, should I doubt of its constant presence, though, alas ! the time of separation may be long, and the distance great ? No, Hilda ! I believe as fully as you can in the future companionship and communion of our spirits in spite of time and place. And so firmly fixed in my mind is this idea, that I believe it to be impossible for me ever in my life to swerve or grow weak in my deep love and trust in you. And how much more so when I know that you too have faith in this great, in this sacred power. To-morrow I must leave you, and bitter is the parting, but these thoughts give me strength for the future. Ours is no common love of the fancy, or of the senses, thank God it is far higher and greater. I offer you, like so many lovers, no vows of my faith and constancy. I promise nothing. I ask you not even to believe in me, and trust me ; my being is so bound up in you that it were sacrilege to make poor vows and promises, as though my soul were so weak that it was

necessary to strengthen its constancy by some idle form of words, made for the ignorant, the superstitious, or the weak hearted. Of you, of your love, of your constant companionship wherever I go, I have no power of doubting. Sooner would I doubt of the great God of heaven Himself."

He stopped speaking, his eyes gleaming with the enthusiasm which stirred up his soul, and his face lightened by the high thoughts which worked within him. She looked at him with the deepest love beaming from her eyes, and said simply, "I believe in you."

They both sat silent for some little time, musing on the words that had been spoken; at last he said, "Hilda, you will let me write to you, won't you?"

She sat thinking for a minute, and then said, "I have thought of that, but, 'Wilfred, here will come the hardest part of the trial, and the part that makes it seem as though I had something to be ashamed of in my caring so much for you, yet the circumstances of our lives, and the laws of the world must be regarded; and if you write to me, you must remember that your letters may always fall into other hands, into the hands of those who cannot

understand us, and would misjudge us. You know that to receive letters from you would be the sweetest thing possible, but if you write it must be but the letters of one intimate friend to another. Alas ! so it must be, yet you can always let me know of your welfare, of where you are, and what you are doing, and be sure that I will always write to you. You are free, and your letters, like your life, are your own."

"Not like my life," he said ; " that, I am now so happy as to be able to say, is no more my own ; it is consecrated to the divinest being on earth."

" Well," she continued, her face brightening up, " our parting this time will not be for long - we go to London so soon that it almost seems absurd to have to send you away before we go ourselves, but Sir Henry is so fidgety when there is a move, that it would worry both you and him to death for you to be here then. You remember what he was on his journey to Scotland ? he is ten times worse when leaving this for any length of time."

" Then so be it," said Wilfred ; " we meet again in the gay world, and though we cannot ride about the sylvan shades of Waldermere

Park, or sit under the ancient yews here and look on to the bowling-green below, and recall the old soldiers, courtiers, and statesmen, who have in their time talked love and politics, or sworn strange oaths in the long years gone by under the same shade, yet London even can have its charms; it was there we first met, and we can again meet on the old scenes, the ball-room, the Park, or the sweet shady river."

"And," said Lady Waldermere, "we can together see how the happy couple are getting on, it will be such fun to see Alice married to her reformed Lovelace., Don't you remember the nice little parties she used to give us when he used to come, and first amuse us by his compliments to her, which he used to deliver with something very like a wink to any of us looking on, and then rather bore us with the endless stories of his amorous adventures in bygone days?"

"She is sure to have a good cook," said Wilfred meditatively, "and I'll bet a hundred that Master Frank, with nearly ten thousand a year, will never have a bad bottle of wine in the house."

"And the happy couple who made their courtship under lock and key in the High-

lands," said she; "have you heard anything of them since? I suppose they will come out tremendously this summer."

"I am told that they rub on splendidly together," he answered, "but I fancy she will not be the gayest of the gay this summer, for I hear that there is reason to believe that the race of Welsh princes will not die out with our friend Owen."

"What a gossiping old woman you are," she said, laughing. "I believe you know all the Gamp news in London, and, if there were only a corner for it in the 'Court Journal,' could always keep it supplied with the first intelligence!"

"What fun such a corner would be," he answered, laughing, "only it would be awkward when the intelligence was incorrect, and would open a too tempting door to practical joking."

So they talked on while the shadows grew long over the old bowling-green and the white terraces, till little Hilda ran out to tell her mother that it was time to come in to dress for dinner, and to stop her talk. The last talk they would have for some time—such a talk as theirs nearly always was,

alternating from grave to gay, from lively to severe, from the sublime to the ridiculous, and it was the many lights and shades of it which made it never dull, and the vein of sympathy in all their ideas which perfected the charm of their mutual society.

CHAPTER IV.

"OH! Mr. St. John, this is good of you to come, and see me," exclaimed the new Mrs. Frank Digby, as Wilfred was shown into her drawing-room, the day after he left Waldermere Park. "I did not know that you were in London yet. I am so sorry Frank is out, but if you will stay and have a long talk, I am sure he will be in, and be so glad to see you."

"I only came up to London yesterday," he said, "and I am sure you are not surprised that your house is the first I came to."

"No; I don't think I am," she answered, "and I am so glad, as I want you to feel that you are just as welcome in the house of Alice Digby in Eaton Square, as in the house of Alice Henderson in Chapel Street."

"I never imagined," he replied, "that

the mere change of a name would change the kind and hospitable nature of Alice Henderson."

"Now, I want you to tell me," said she, "you were not surprised, were you, at the news of my marriage?"

"Well, if you ask me so directly, I must confess that it took me a little by surprise," he said, remembering the scene when Lady Waldermere and Mrs. Addington had chaffed him so unmercifully, on imparting the news to him. "But, *ma chère madame*, if people will be so prompt in carrying their plans into effect, they must not always expect that the imagination of their friends will keep pace with them."

"But," said she, "do you think it was so very hurried? I don't know what there was to wait for. I had no one's consent to ask," she added, laughing, "and we had been friends for years. I knew he was devoted to me, and I thought that at last his devotion should be rewarded. I have such trust in his honour that I refused to have any settlements though he pressed me very much to; and, do you know, I should have been obliged to marry some one, or have given up continental

society. I had four offers at Nice from foreigners, and had my choice between being a Princess and a Duchess, and certainly they could be very agreeable, and it was very hard to get them to take a No ; but I am afraid that the morals of nearly all of them were so bad. It is very sad to think that men can be so pleasant and so unprincipled."

"Well, at any rate, you have made a safe choice on that score," Wilfred could not resist saying ; "we all know our dear old Frank well enough."

"Yes," she said, not perceiving the least joke in his remark ; "I am very happy on that point. Frank used to talk rather recklessly, but he is quite good in reality."

"But are you going quite to give up foreign society ?" he asked ; "I thought you were so fond of it, and it is a pity almost ; besides, Frank speaks French like a native."

"No ; I don't see why we should," she answered, "and I always feel so much at home in that society, the habit of talking French before many people, the power of conversation of the *salon*, is so difficult to learn, and so few English people get it, that

I don't see why we should throw away one of the great pleasures of life, and I have no doubt we shall be a good deal abroad in the winter."

Wilfred could not help smiling inwardly, when he remembered the delightful way that Lady Waldermere used at times to take off the accent and idioms of the unsuspecting Alice, but no power would have convinced her that it was any thing but the most utter ignorance that saw anything curious in her French; and she had been so frequently complimented on it by men who spoke it with the fluency and accent of a Swiss courier, and who admired her comely person and her comfortable fortune, that she was happy in the conviction that she was an accomplished linguist.

"But," said she, "you have told me nothing yet of Hilda, and I know you have been down at Waldermere. Bessie Addington told me you were there."

"That fair lady is extremely well," he answered. "I have had a very pleasant visit there; and I don't think I was ever in a more lovely place in summer. How delightful it must be to have such a place! And such a wife," he thought sadly to himself, and the

reflection came across him that the Tenth Commandment must have been most ineffectually impressed on him in the days of his youth.

"Yes," she said, "it is a charming place, and so comfortable to stay in, and I like to see Hilda and Sir Henry together; he is so kind and so courteous, and so very highbred in look and manner, and she is so devoted to him."

"Ye Gods!" thought Wilfred, "that fair lady could make some of her intimate friends believe in anything, but she is quite right, and how little *I* knew of her inner life for so long." But he knew that the believing in devotion of people in general to some one, and to herself in particular, was one of Mrs. Digby's weaknesses, so he answered,

"Oh! yes, they got on well enough together; but who could not get on with Lady Waldermere?"

"When do they come to London?" she asked.

"In three or four days," he said; "they were beginning to prepare when I left the park, but Sir Henry does not get under weigh quite as quickly as an eighteen-ton cutter. But tell me, what is the news of the

Addingtons, and how is the domestic barometer there ? ”

“ Oh ! I think they always get on perfectly now ; you know Bessie used to try him a great deal, but he is very nice about it, and has really had a good deal to provoke him ; if he has not always cared very much about her, you cannot wonder at his being jealous of his honour.”

“ No, I think he is a pattern husband,” he said, laughing ; “ he goes his way, and he lets her go a good way hers, but, you see, he kicks every now and then, and of course that makes a little unpleasantness in the house. But how are things there now ? What was your impression on your return ? ”

“ Why do you ask me so particularly ? ” she asked. “ I know of nothing whatever new with them, and have heard of nothing this winter that could disturb the domestic peace of Kirthorpe. Bessie is becoming wiser, I think. But have you heard anything about them ? you have been staying with them I know.”

“ Oh ! no ; nothing at all,” he answered. “ I was not asking about anything in particular, but as they are such very intimate mutual

friends of ours, I was anxious to hear how you thought they were getting on."

"Come and judge for yourself," she said, "to-morrow evening they dine with us, and I believe I am an old enough friend of yours to give you a verbal invitation in spite of the opinions I have heard you express against such things, except under very special circumstances."

"It is always a special circumstance," he replied, "whenever and however often Mrs. Digby can ask me to dinner; and it is a circumstance to which I should always bow my assent if anyhow possible, and on this occasion I bow very low indeed."

Wilfred was now showing some signs of departing, but his companion put such strong compulsion on him to wait a little and see if dear Frank came in that he stayed, and towards half-past six the happy bridegroom turned up. Neither of them could help being a little amused at meeting again like this after all that had passed, as both had discussed the fair lady in days gone by, and the feeling had been tolerably plainly expressed that she with a large fortune was a very easy way out of debt and difficulty; and Digby, who was not troubled

with much of the refined sentiment of Wilfred, had a sort of feeling that he had got two to one the best of him, and not for one minute now he was removed by the holy tie of matrimony from his path, did he feel one twinge of jealousy for the past friendship of his lady towards him, or the least fear that, his presence or attentions to her would make his domestic peace for one instant precarious. He had had plenty of experience of life, he judged his wife pretty correctly, and for the rest, he was not likely to be ever exacting from a lady so discreet as Mrs. Henderson, who had endowed him with nearly ten thousand a year, and had married him without settlements.

He welcomed Wilfred most warmly, and heartily backed up his wife's invitation to dinner the following day. Wilfred was amused to study him at home, he was so very much at home already with the fair Alice, he treated her quite parentally, and she, with the profession of being his sovereign, and the lady who commanded him in everything, was so evidently his slave that it was delightful to watch her unconscious submission. Frank Digby himself was changed in the two months

that he had been married. There was an absence of the expression of care and anxiety which, in spite of his flow of spirits and imperturbable good humour, his intimate friends could always detect in him in bygone days; and there was too a decided tendency to look as though his meals nourished him rather better than they had done for some years. In his dress, though still scrupulously neat and in the best of taste, there was a little less the mark of perpetual thought, and there was insensibly the air of a well-to-do-man, added to the smartness of a man of society. And Wilfred thought that he detected a shade or two less of blue about his whiskers and hair, with a suspicion of a grey hair here and there, as though Father Time and all his traces were treated with rather more contempt than in the days of debt and struggle. He could not help wondering what his feelings would have been if he had stood in Frank Digby's shoes, and if his nightcap now had a lawful claim to a place on the frilled pillows of a certain sacred chamber on the floor above,—if he had never known Hilda Waldermere, and in short, if he had cut Master Frank out, as he had sufficient vanity to flatter himself that he might

have done in spite of all the chaff of the two ladies in Prince's Gate ;—wealth, comfort, a companion most good tempered, if not brilliant or romantic, and no more cares and worries for the future ;—and, if he were still ambitious, money enough to give him a very good chance of a seat in Parliament. But no, not for one minute did he envy him, never for one moment did he hesitate in preferring one hour of the enchanting society of her, who was the only delight of his life, to years of commonplace comfort and ease. He knew how Frank Digby would in his heart despise him as a sentimental idiot, if he knew what was passing in his mind, and that the world with scarce an exception would not hesitate in writing him down an ass for his romantic infatuation, as they would call his love for Lady Waldermere, while a great part of it would read homilies on the sin of a sentiment that they were totally incapable of comprehending, in his exalted love for one who was hopelessly separated from him by the closest ties of the world, backed by the deadliest anathemas of the Church to pour on the luckless infringer of those ties.

Frank Digby shook him warmly by the hand with the warmth of grasp of an old

friend, and a successful rival. Wilfred returned it with the equally warm grasp of a friend of an ancient date, and with the recollection fresh upon him of the days when they had so frequently discussed their pecuniary difficulties together, not to mention occasions on which they had been directly or indirectly of assistance to each other, and also with the feelings of a rival who feels more rejoiced at success of the other than he would have been at his own.

“Frank,” said his wife, “Mr. St. John will come and dine with us to-morrow; I am so glad you have come in before he went. We have been talking over old times together for the last hour and a half.”

There was a twinkle in Francis Digby’s eye, as he replied, “Have you, my dear, then I have no doubt you have had some very edifying conversation, and I am glad I stayed so long at the club. I feel I should have been sadly *de trop*. You know, St. John, one of the worst things of knowing the world so well as you and I do, is knowing its wickedness; and it’s no use expecting too much—even of one’s wife,” he added, laughing, and putting his hand gently on the plump shoulder of the fair

Alice. "I feel that she will talk over all sorts of things with even the likes of *you*, and I know that it is better not to fight against human nature. To be, or not to be! that is *not* the question, for intimate conversations are *to be*, and it is far better to bear the ills we know of, in the shape of our old friends kicking their heels in the little drawing-room with our fascinating wives, than fly to those we know not of, in the shape of a new importation of men whose ways we know not, and who bore us very much when we find that our better, and, of course, wiser half has asked them to dinner."

"He is always chaffing, as you know, Mr. St. John," said she, "and you know, Frank, that at any rate my taste is sufficiently to be relied on not to ask men to dinner who would bore you, as I flatter myself, though you *are* so sarcastic about the men whom *we* women like, that a man who would bore you is not likely to be very amusing to me."

"My dear," he answered, "you are right here, as in fact always; do you know, St. John, that we have discovered a similarity of taste in friends that promises the very best for the future?" As he said this he sat himself down

on a low chair close to his wife; and as Wilfred looked half away at something for a moment, he saw that he took his wife's hand and pressed it to his lips. There was a naturalness, and a real expression of affection about the way he did it that sent a thrill of pleasure through the heart of Wilfred, who was really glad to see such promises of domestic happiness between two people whom he had the very greatest regard for, and about whom he had had some misgiving as to their future comfort together.

"I trust," said Mrs. Digby, "that we shall go on uniting our small circle of friends as much as ever, and if possible more so; we mean to have some parties on the river this summer, and Maidenhead will be often our headquarters. I trust that I shall see as much of Hilda and Bessie as ever. We had such a delightful little set last summer, and continued it in the Highlands, where you, you naughty man, would not come, but went off yachting with that friend of yours, who, you know, is the only one of them I don't like."

"My dearest," said Digby, "as to the merits of the owner of the 'Sea Dove,' we have, as you know, agreed to differ. But as to my coming to Glen Dhu, you must remember

that cruel snubbing which you gave me at the end of the season, almost the very last time we met, how could you expect me to come after that? You know that my present happiness is only caused by our chance meeting at Nice, where I had gone to win a fortune out of M. Blanc, or blow my brains out, and, as you now know, I made my fortune, but in a very different way to what I had anticipated."

"Well, we won't fight our battles over again," she answered, "but we'll look forward to all the amusements of the summer, and those two will, I know, join us in them, they are so fond of each other; and then Sir Percy will be here again; it will be delightful altogether.

"Delightful," thought Wilfred, "if there were some of them as guileless as Mrs. Digby, but, alas! he could hope for but little happiness from the love bestowed now by Mrs. Addington on Lady Waldermere.

Wilfred then very soon wished his friends adieu until eight o'clock the following evening, and walked back to Piccadilly, reflecting on the couple he had just left; and the more he reflected, the more he felt that, in spite of wealth and even the affectionate nature of the

lady he had been talking to, Frank Digby was far more the right man in the right place than he would ever have been. Though he could never be married, never have the affection of a wife to make life sweet, and to brighten a home for him, he felt far happier in living in an ideal world, and in the sympathy and love of one who, though hopelessly separated from him materially, was intellectually so closely united to him, and who was so infinitely above all other women he had ever known, that the deepest devotion of any other would seem poor and weak indeed after her love.

The following day as he was to meet the Addingtons at dinner, he thought he would not go and visit them, as he had a sort of instinct that Mrs. Addington was declaring war on Lady Waldermere, and directly or indirectly on him, and he in his heart rather dreaded a long *tête-à-tête* with her, which he would very likely have if he were to go to Prince's Gate that afternoon.

When the evening came, he was able to judge of the magnificence of the state that the Digbys had already established in Eaton Square. The retinue who received him in the hall was of

the princely order, and he could not help being a little amused at the way Digby had adapted himself so very quickly and easily to his new state of affluence. The look of comfortable prosperity which he had remarked the afternoon of the day before, was still more apparent on him as he received his guests with all the cordiality of a man who takes a real pleasure in feeding his friends, and does not merely give a dinner party in a perfunctory manner, and as a sort of duty to society which must be endured.

The dress of the 'bride was magnificence itself, and she displayed her ample and full-blossomed charms with all the profusion which the great master in Paris who prepared her toilette permitted. If a fault could have been found with the whole establishment, it would have been that there was a suspicion of profusion about it, but there was so much good taste at the same time that what there was could easily pass as only the exuberance of hospitality.

He had not been there many minutes before the magnificent gentleman, who condescended to do the duties of major-domo to the establishment, announced the Addingtons.

Mrs. Addington's eye caught his the moment she came into the room, and he saw a slight and almost imperceptible raising of her eyebrows, but whether it merely betokened surprise at seeing him, or what the feeling it betrayed might be, he could not say, as she passed quickly on to embrace the substantial form of her dear friend.

The party was not numerous, and Wilfred found himself standing a little apart from the others with Charley Addington, who said to him with a grin, "I say, Wilfred, what a muff you were to let all this slip. I was in hopes it would have been you who would have entertained us with the gay widow to back you up, instead of Frank, but you always let your chances slip while you are philandering after some one's wife; whose is it now? mine or someone else's?"

Charley Addington was in the habit of expressing his thoughts so plainly, and in such forcible language that it was impossible even to ignore his meaning, and he was so cheery and good-humoured it was equally impossible to be angry with him; but it was trying to have the matter put so straight to him as he now put it to Wilfred.

“My dear Charley,” he answered, “you always put things so unnecessarily strongly, surely one can be friends with people, and not be philandering, as you call it?”

“Some people can no doubt,” he said, “but not the likes of you. I know you too well, but I wish you had married the widow, you would be much more comfortable yourself, and be a more confidential member of society.”

“You mean I should have given a hostage to it, my friend,” Wilfred answered, laughing, “or is it the fox who had the mishap in the trap? Is it so much ‘nicer’ to go through life minus the brush? Thank you, at present I like whisking mine about in whatever covert pleases me best.”

“Yes,” he replied, “but you cannot expect the owners of the coverts to feel any overwhelming satisfaction in seeing you whisking it so triumphantly among their pheasants, but I suppose I cannot stop you, and that I shall see before the summer is over what your little game is now.”

They had now to separate and go down to dinner, and Wilfred found himself next to Mrs. Addington at the table.

“How is Waldermere Park?” asked that

lady as soon as they were seated, and she had shaken her plumage into order.

"Waldermere Park was very well when I left it," he answered.

"And is that so long ago?" said she.

"No, only a couple of days," he answered.

"And how did Hilda use you?" she went on, "are you yet promoted, as I told you you might hope to be?"

"My dear Mrs. Addington," he said, laughing, "there is no change of any sort in my friendship for Lady Waldermere; we always get on well together, and I trust we always shall, but why should you think that there should have been any change in the nature of my intimacy with her?"

"You forget how well I know you," she answered.

"Not for one minute," he answered, looking into Mrs. Addington's face with a glance full of meaning; "but women are not a bit alike, you must remember, any more than men are."

"Which means," she said, "that there is a vast difference between me and Lady Waldermere."

"It means," he answered, "that though you may not be exactly alike, it does not prevent you both being very charming in your several ways."

"Now you are trying to shut me up with a compliment," she said. "I have always observed with men that if they are driven into a corner, or feel they cannot give you a reasonable answer, they always try to stop your mouth with a compliment. But you don't answer my question, which was, if you are going to be Lady Waldermere's particular friend this summer, as you did not like the name of *cavaliere servante*."

"No," he answered, "I don't think that you will see any change whatever between the way I behaved towards Lady Waldermere last summer and the way I shall behave this, except of course that I know her better, and," he added, "very much thanks to my very charming neighbour."

Mrs. Addington was not at all satisfied, as she hoped to have made Wilfred say something or other she could take hold of, but finding that she could get nothing whatever out of him, she let the conversation turn to other matters, while he lent all his energy

to make himself pleasant to her and talked away in the same style as in days gone by, in hopes of soothing her wounded vanity, quite determined to conceal from her, as from all the world, as far as it was possible, his feelings of devotion to the lady she had chosen to consider her rival.

The evening passed away pleasantly, Mrs. Digby was evidently as happy as it was possible to be, and so well contented with herself and her Frank that she reflected something of her blissful state on all about her. As Wilfred had predicted, it would have been hard to find much fault with either the cook or the cellar, so that he was quite in earnest when he said to Digby on wishing him good night, that he was now convinced of his good taste, and his knowledge of how to make the wheels of life run easy, and that he should not mind dining with him every day, except that at the end of a year no horse would ever carry him to hounds again, and at the end of two, gout would claim him for its own.

CHAPTER V.

LONDON was now at its fullest; Epsom and Ascot brought their contingent of country sportsmen, real and would-be, and Piccadilly was gay with spring captains, the shininess of whose hats, the varnish of whose boots, and the freshness of whose button-holes was a sight both to dream of and to see. The friends who had seen so much of each other for the past year were busily engaged in the labours of the season; and though they met frequently, the cares and worries of what people are pleased to call the pleasures of the season occupied much of their time.

Wilfred managed to see Lady Waldermere pretty frequently, but how different were the short opportunities he had of a few words with her, to the long delightful hours they had passed together since the last season in

London. Each of them longed to be always with the other, but each of them felt how necessary it was to escape the danger of coming under the lash of the scandal-loving world. Still their meetings were very different from what they had been in days gone by—before they had read so deeply in each other's hearts. Then, whilst both enjoyed the society of the other more than that of any one on earth, though they were ignorant of each other's feelings, there was mingled with it doubt and uncertainty, and a feeling of misgiving about the future, almost of dread. Now that was all passed away—now when they met it seemed as though they took up the thread of life just where it had been left when they last parted, and as though they only existed when together, while the intervals when they were separated were blank spaces. They neither hoped for nor feared the future; the pleasure of mutual trust and mutual confidence made the present intensely happy; and that was enough for them. They had faith so strong in each other that it gave them a feeling of faith in the future. They had been some time in London, and nothing of any note had occurred; Wilfred had gone out into society more than he

was in the habit of doing before, so as to be sure to meet Lady Waldermere wherever she went, but he soon perceived that he had the eye of Mrs. Addington upon him, and he began to be afraid of that lady, and to feel that he was making, if he had not already made, a real enemy of her. Her husband, on the contrary, was more friendly than ever; and when he saw that Wilfred was doing anything but make love to his better or worse half, he was always asking him to his house, or to join some party or other with them. Mrs. Addington was ready enough to back him up in his hospitality, but he felt, more than saw, that there was a change in her towards him. She had quite given up chaffing him about Lady Waldermere, and he felt as though this was only like a lull before the storm. He saw that Mrs. Addington was wounded in her vanity, far more than in her heart, for he very much doubted if that much-used organ had ever beat any the faster for his coming or going; but, be that as it might, there was no doubt which was the most powerful motive-power in her, pride or sentiment; and it was her pride, her vanity, that had suffered the hurt by the preference which he had so unwillingly, so unintentionally shown for Lady Waldermere.

So matters went on, till one evening at a ball he was sitting with Lady Waldermere in a room away from the dancing-room, and had been talking to her for some time, when he saw on looking in a pier-glass—which, from where he was, reflected the door of the room, so that he could watch what went on there without any one else perceiving it—Mrs. Addington standing at the door with a man whom he knew only by sight, but who was an intimate friend of Frank Digby. He could see plainly that Mrs. Addington was talking about them, and there was a look upon her face which there was no mistaking—a look of hatred that he could not have believed she had in her. She was evidently pointing them out to the man who was with her, and he could feel no doubt was saying something far from complimentary to one or both of them. An undefined dread entered his heart, and he had some trouble to conceal it from his companion, who he hoped would not see the pair in the doorway. He made a movement as though he were going to get up, and he saw Mrs. Addington put her hand into the man's arm and walk away. He very soon afterwards took Lady Waldermere back into the

other room, and about half an hour later he was in the supper-room. Frank Digby was there, and when he saw him, and that he was talking to no one, he came up to him, and said,

“Look here, old man, I want to say a word to you. I know that what I am going to say is infringing on rather delicate ground, but we are such old friends, I am sure you will take it in the spirit it is meant, and not think me inquisitive, or interfereing where I have no business. The fact is, that I am going to speak to you about Lady Waldermere. Now, you need not look quite so fierce; I am going to say nothing that can offend any one. You see, I, as well as my wife and other intimate friends, have seen of course, as was plain enough, that you were very good friends with her. I am not going for one minute to hint anything against that lady’s character; I fully admire her beauty, and her agreeableness, and any man must be happy as well as proud to be a friend of hers. And I can heartily say that I believe there is not a better woman in England, so I feel so little hesitation in speaking to you. You see you were a very good friend of Mrs. Addington’s before you were

quite so intimate with Lady Waldermere; she too is lively and agreeable, and you showed your taste there, and I have a strong suspicion that she regarded you with the far from unfavourable eye, but you know your own little affairs best about that. But, you see, fair ladies do not like to be made love to, and then to see themselves left out, and another put in their place. I know the little game well enough, so I can speak from experience. Some take it philosophically; some very much the reverse, but they none of them like it; it wounds their vanity, and Solomon was indeed right when he said all women were vanity, or words to that effect—and he had had some experience of them—and, though they mostly console themselves very soon with some one else, and are apt to be rather down on the men who have proved fickle, they never forgive the women who have taken their place, and if they were their friends before, they then hate them six times as much. Now, my dear Wilfred, you have been unlucky enough to hurt the vanity, or other tender point, of Mrs. Addington, maybe her heart; it is no business of mine, but what rightly or wrongly I am making my business at this moment is to warn

you that she means mischief to Lady Waldermere, and either directly or indirectly to you. Now I will tell you what makes me speak to you this evening in particular. More than once lately, my wife, who you know is good-nature itself, and can see no evil in any one, has remarked to me that it almost seemed as though Mrs. Addington did not care to meet Lady Waldermere in the way she used to. She did not seem as though she thought very much of it, nor did she give any reason for it, and so I kept my ideas to myself, and saw no good in mentioning them to any one ; but this evening, a little while ago, Mansfield happened to be talking to me, and said, ‘ Oh ! you are an intimate friend of St. John and the Waldermeres, so you can tell me what’s all this I hear of his being desperately in love with her, and there being a probability of ‘a great scandal about it?’ I said at once, ‘ I know nothing about it ; I know he knows her very well, but I never heard or saw anything about his being in love with her, and as for her, I don’t believe there is a straighter woman in London ; and I am sure in my own mind that the man is not born who will lead her astray, and as for scandal, if there was any chance of

one, I am sure I must have heard of it.' Then I said, 'How did you hear of this? because it seems to me so extraordinary that people should be talking of such a thing.' And he said, 'Why, I was dancing with Mrs. Addington this evening, and we happened to pass a room where St. John was sitting with Lady Waldermere, talking away very comfortably far from the busy hum, and when she spoke of all this, and spoke of it too in a way that made me think she must, as an intimate friend, know a good deal; she did not say much, but she let me infer as much as I liked, and she said she was so sorry for it, as they were such friends of hers, and she should feel it a good deal, apart from the unpleasantness of having her intimate friends dragged before the public.' "

"And what did you say to him?" asked Wilfred

"Why, of course, I said I did not believe a word of it, and I took upon myself to say that I knew you had had a flirtation with Mrs. Addington in days gone by, and that I believed she had said all this to indemnify herself for her wounded feelings. He laughed and said it was just like a woman, and I hope he will not talk about it; but I spoke to you now to

warn you, because if she says this to one man like that she will say it to another, and it may be repeated, and you know how ready people are to believe any evil of a woman so pretty as Lady Waldermere, and any one would naturally think it must be well known, if so intimate a friend of both of you as Mrs. Addington can talk so openly of it. Now I've told you all this to put you on your guard, and I hope you will, as I said, take it as I have meant it."

"That you may be quite sure I shall," said Wilfred, "and I think it is very good of you, old boy, to tell me, but I am desperately puzzled what to do. You see, though it is an utter lie from end to end, she has it in her power to do us an infinity of mischief, and of course, as usual, the worst of it falls not on the man; how can I stop that woman's tongue? Damn her! I wish I could cut it out."

"It is a most infernal bore," answered Digby, "and puts a sad spoke in your wheel with Lady Waldermere, who is charming; but, my dear Wilfred, this is what comes of your confirmed old habit of flirting so, your sin will always find you out."

"You infernal old humbug, Frank!" cried

Wilfred. "You, who have been the greatest rip of the lot of us, you go and marry and think that you are whitewashed clean, and can read sermons to us now as though you had never carried on with as many women at a time as you could remember the names of! Don't you try to come the righteous man over me, but make a little use of your past experience in helping me to stop this blessed woman's tongue."

"Well, we will think; first to take the selfish view of it—directly, she can't do you very little harm, you have no wife, and for you it is only the glory of another conquest, and such a victim as the beautiful, the proud, the immaculate Lady Waldermere! Why, every man will envy you, and every woman run after you! And as for your moral character, why—ahem!—we won't talk much about that."

"My moral character is good enough," growled Wilfred, "but you are right enough as to the disgusting one-sidedness of the world. For my name to be coupled with that of such a woman as Lady Waldermere would be rather a matter of congratulation to me in the world, and with all their piety there's

more than one virtuous man would be inclined to risk the welfare of his soul for the love of such a woman as Lady Waldermere—I know all that only too well,—and if I thought I could for one minute swagger about being in any way favoured, in the smallest degree, by her, I would go and shoot myself to-morrow. But this world which pats the man on the back, has no mercy on the woman; it is indeed *Væ Victis* with her! How other women delight in taking away such a woman's character, how pleased they would be to hear that she had succumbed to one of the crowd of admirers that they have always so hated her for collecting round her! And yet Lady Waldermere has as few enemies as so pretty and charming a woman can have. Still, the joy on earth, whatever it may be in heaven, is not over one sinner that repenteth, but over one saint that sinneth! And this would be loudly and widely expressed in her instance. And if I were the cause of such a misery to her, as the making her the common talk, and the subject of the tittle-tattle of all the tabbies of London, I should never forgive myself. My dear fellow, what is to be done?"

"Well, we need not jump to a determina-

tion to-night," answered Digby, "but we will think about it to-morrow. Let me see, I have nothing to do in the forenoon, we will meet at the club, and take a turn in the Park, and you can come in to lunch afterwards if you are hungry, and we'll talk it well over then. But I see madame on the stairs, and so I must say bye-bye till to-morrow at twelve."

Frank Digby bustled away to get the carriage for his better half, and Wilfred remained in the supper-room in a most unenviable frame of mind. Every now and then a vague dread of something of this kind had come over him, but he never dreamt of having it brought home to him in this practical way before; and though he had felt Mrs. Addington's hostility, he never thought she was capable of anything so disgusting as to attack them in this way—in a way that left them perfectly defenceless, for to defend themselves was to call attention to the report, and as most of the world would say, to confirm it. Wilfred knew well enough what a tender flower the fair name of a woman is, and that if you once bruise it, however unjustly, it can never blossom again quite so brightly

as before. He devoured some grapes in a meditative sort of way, and got very little inspiration out of them, so he bethought himself of Lady Waldermere, and had so much confidence in her good sense that he made up his mind to tell her at once. He knew she was not gone, as he was to have the pleasure of putting her into her carriage, and of being the last man to press the tips of her little fingers that night. He went upstairs and saw her sitting by Sir Percy Fitzroy, who was working the 'eye trick' in the old style, and who looked at him with a sort of friendly dislike as mistrusting the position of affairs between him and the lady he was sitting by, but the days were long passed when Wilfred felt the least feeling of jealousy or doubt in connection with Sir Percy and Lady Waldermere. They had often discussed Sir Percy, and while criticising his weaknesses in a way which would have maddened him could he but have known it, they did fair justice to his high abilities and the good qualities he possessed. Now Wilfred's mind was so full of the present difficulty that he did not think of him as in any way different to any other man whom he wanted to

detach her from to tell her what he was so full of. She saw from his look that something was wrong, and he said to her, "Lady Waldermere, you promised me one short turn of a waltz when the room was a little clearer, and I have come to claim it. I am sure Sir Percy will not oppose my plea very strongly, comfortable though he looks by your side there."

"If I might," said he, "you know I would oppose it. I like everything in life that is pleasant, and I hate to be disturbed in it, and sitting by Lady Waldermere on this very comfortable chair is one of the happy moments of life, but I always submit myself with the very best of graces to her will."

"I will dance a little of it," she said, "but you must remember I am very tired. I will not get out of my chair till the music begins."

"Thanks very much," he answered. "I will come for you then in a few minutes." In a very little time the introduction to one of Strauss's delightful waltzes began, and Wilfred came back to claim his partner.

As he led her towards the dancers, he said, "I knew you would forgive my interrupting a conversation,—even with Sir Percy," he added

looking at her and smiling, "but the fact is I have something very special to say to you, so if you will first have one turn to the strains of the 'Blue Danube,' the best of waltzes, just for the sake of appearances, we will sit down and I will tell you all about it."

Wilfred loved dancing for its own sake, and as he put his arm round the slight figure of his partner, and swept with her smoothly and quietly round the now nearly empty room, feeling the warmth of her breath and the touch of her beautiful hair on his cheek, his cares and worries for the moment vanished, and he whispered in her ear, "If this could only go on for ever! Oh! my own darling Hilda." Much longer did they go on sweeping easily, gracefully, and perfectly together round the polished floor than was in the least necessary for the sake of appearances, as he had said, but both of them were carried away by the charm of the lovely music and the delightful feeling of being so close together, till she told him at last to take her to a seat.

"Now," said she, "what is your mysterious news? I believe it was merely an excuse to get that waltz, but I can almost forgive

you if it was, for I did enjoy it in a way I seldom do a dance now."

"I wish to heaven it was nothing but that," he answered, "and I too should feel that the result had justified the fib; but it was no fib, and it is a very unpleasant truth that I have to communicate to you," and he then told her exactly what Frank Digby had said to him about Mrs. Addington and Colonel Mansfield, and how he had seen them looking at them through the door in the early part of the evening, but had not pointed it out because it might annoy her. *

She heard him to the end, and then said, "I am not surprised to hear it. I have seen it coming for a long time. I know Bessie Addington's nature pretty well. You were a most outrageous flirt, and now you must pay some of the penalty for it. For my part, I don't care; she may do her worst; I defy her. People will see very well that it is all jealousy, and my character can pretty well take care of itself."

"I can quite appreciate your defiance," he answered, "but are you sure you are right in thinking what she can do of so little importance? I may be foolish, but I cannot help

fearing that she may do much mischief to both of us."

"But what can we do?" said Lady Waldermere. "If you can make any practical suggestion as to how to get her out of the way, I am ready to consider it; but you can't poison her off, or have her shut up in a lunatic asylum, so that I don't see what you are to do. Would you like me to go and beg her to hold her tongue? Of course, she would be silent then."

"It is what is to be done that I wanted to ask you about. I confess I was floored," he said, "but I thought your fertile brain might hit on something." Then he said after a little pause, "If it were really a question of your happiness, of the honour of your name which you hold so high, Hilda, I could tear myself away, hard though the struggle would be. It would be very painful to me to think it necessary, but I should not love you so dearly as I do, if I could not make this sacrifice for you. Oh! it is easy enough to talk of it like this. But it is maddening to me to think what it would now be like to tear myself away from England, and not see you again perhaps for years; it is only when I think of that, that I feel the

great change you have made in me. I used to think so little of leaving England for an indefinite time, and have wandered abroad in days gone by with a feeling of pleasure at going ; and now if I leave England I leave all my life behind me ! Hilda, do you know that at times I have had dreams come over me. I think of how delightful life would be if you could be always with me. If I could, if only it were possible to transport you to another world where we should never part ! I feel such a certainty that we should not tire of each other. Ours is no love of boy and girl ; we both of us know the world ; we both of us can read the other's mind, look into the other's storehouse of intellect and see there food for endless years of delightful intercourse, and of deep mutual interest, while there is over all such a love and a power of love, as few people have,—it is such a sweet dream."

"Dreams !" she said in a low voice, "only dreams !" Then she added after a short pause, "But I see no reason for your going away. We have nothing to blame ourselves for, our own consciences are clear, and for the rest, with a little care the world need not

be troubled with our loves and hates, and our hopes and sorrows."

"*I am glad you really think so,*" he answered; "it cheers me very much, and I only trust that you are right, but for the moment one of my sisters is very unwell, and I feel it would be a great act of kindness to run down to see her for a few days,—if I am absent for a week you may be able to see what the enemy is doing, and I am sure Frank will tell me what he knows. I don't think he was ever very fond of her, and it is possible she may show some of her hand to Alice Digby, who she knows will never suspect what she is up to, and she may forget that she is sure to repeat every word to her dear Frank."

"Well," said Lady Waldermere, "if you like to go to your sister's for a week, there is no harm done, and we can see then what happens. Of course I am very sorry to lose you, but I can see very little really of you now. But you may write to me what you like, just now there is no fear of any one reading your letters to me. When should you go?"

"The day after to-morrow I think," he

answered, "so I may not see you again, but that is the address, and I know you will write to me any news, and I will write to you—nothing new I am afraid,—but the old old story which I trust you may never be any more tired of hearing than I of telling!

"Now you may get me my carriage," she said, "I must think over all you have said."

"Dreams and all?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes dreams and all!" she answered softly.

"Do you remember Shelley's 'Good Night?'" he said, as they stood at the foot of the stairs, after he had wrapped her in her soft cloak, and with a lace wrapper round her head she was looking up at him, with the sweetest and most innocent face in the world. "Don't you remember I showed it you once? It begins,

'Good night! Ah, no! The hour is ill
Which severs those it should unite.'

"Yes, dear, I remember it only too well!" she said softly in his ear as he put her into her carriage, and his hand clung to hers with a long lingering pressure.

The carriage drove off, and he walked down the street, now deserted and grey with the

early light of morning, and though he was alone, there still seemed to hover round him a sense of *her* presence as though *her* gentle spirit had never quite left him, accompanied him now to his home, and watched over him and blessed him in his dreams.

CHAPTER VI.

THE following morning Wilfred met Frank Digby, and they strolled out together into the Park, which was in all its summer beauty of flowers and foliage still ungrimed by smoke. After taking a turn up it and criticising the horses and their riders, both rather unsparingly, they settled themselves down on two chairs in a shady spot where they could see all that was passing.

"I have been thinking over all you said to me last night," said Wilfred at last, "and I cannot see what on earth to do; has a night's rest sharpened your brains? I am more than half inclined to let the whole thing slide along. After all, I don't see quite that Mrs. Addington can do so very much harm; she can chatter a bit, but I don't know what else she can do."

"I grant you," he answered, "it is very

hard to see one's way ; but as to what she may do, that is another thing. You seem hardly to realise as the words of the poet express it, which were switched so effectually into me at Eton that I still remember them,—‘*Furens quid foemina possit*,’ or what a woman with her back up is capable of. You see what I am afraid of is, that if she cannot drive you away herself, or make Lady Waldermere drive you away in any other manner, she may find some way of infusing the poison into the mind of Sir Henry. What line he would take if any one stirred him up I have no idea, but it would make things very miserable for his wife.”

“I wish to God I had never set eyes on Mrs. Addington,” said Wilfred, “why must she make us so wretched? I am sure I never did anything but amuse her, and make her life very cheery when I was with her. We had the greatest fun down at Folkestone together, why on earth can’t she be grateful for the part I had in helping her in that fun, without being ready to cut my throat because we cannot have it all over again? I am sure I bear no grudge against any of the fair creatures who have helped to enliven some of

my dull hours, and who now dance to the piping of some other shepherd. Live and let live! If they would only be a little more liberal minded! Some women seem to expect to have it just as they like, and then rampage like this if they cannot."

"Well, you see," said Digby, "it is not altogether only women who feel like that, there are men who are very considerably disgusted when things go wrong with them, and I am afraid that there are many who would revenge themselves just like our friend, but that they know every decent man would cut them for doing it, and so they are afraid to. Women have not the fear of this excommunication for their sins, and they are always ready to risk more to carry out their object, whether it is to obtain some pleasure or to gratify some revenge, than men ever are; and they are consequently much more unscrupulous when quite roused. I honestly confess it seems to me very hard to know what to do. It seems precious hard that you should have to give up the friendship, or at any rate the society of a most agreeable woman to gratify the malice of a spiteful one, but I must say that I see hardly any alternative between

seeing as little as possible of Lady Waldermere, and braving the machinations of Mrs. Addington. I feel pretty sure myself which you will do ; and, unless I very much misjudge female character, which Lady Waldermere would wish you to do, for I am sure she is the sort of woman to utterly defy the demon and all his or her works. After all, she may have a better angel somewhere, and he may be at her elbow and give her a pinch in some fleshy part when she is going to commit an atrocity. But it is these women who goad each other on to commit follies only too often. Curse them !—I have had enough experience of it in my past career. I am really not sure which are the most cruel and hard on their kind ; the ones who are malicious and spiteful like Mrs. Addington, or the women who, having had their fun and their fling, are rather past it, and are beginning to sing a psalm of penitence through their nose, and who take to the sins of uncharitableness and selfishness instead of the more agreeable ones of their earlier days, or those again who have never had any fun, and who in their hearts envy those who have, and under the guise of sanctimoniousness devote to the infernal powers

their more fortunate sisters, who have enjoyed the fun they so much wish for themselves. I remember once putting a woman, whose personal charms were not of the order of those of the fair Helen, into such a rage. She was cutting away most unmercifully at the character of a great friend of mine, and she said at last, 'Well, thank God! nothing could ever make *me* do what *she* has done!' so I said, 'Madame, are you sure that you were ever placed in the same temptation that *she* has been?' I could not help giving it to her, but it's fair to say that *she* never forgave me. I'll back your saint for unforgiveness against your sinner any day."

"Well, Frank," said Wilfred, "your recollections seem to make you this morning almost as bitter against the hostile classes of women as I am, but, unfortunately, cursing them does not shut up their mouths for one minute. We seem to have come to the conclusion that there is nothing to do, so I suppose I had better do it. At this moment I am thinking of going down to see my sister Mrs. Walford, in Kent, for a few days, so I shall be out of the way for a little. She is not at all well, and wants me to run down, and

it is a very pretty place in summer. When I come back we will see again how the land lies; who knows but that Mrs. Addington may have thought better of it? Anyhow, I have always been very much in the habit of drifting quietly down the current when I found that by struggling I did no good, and only fatigued myself."

The two remained talking for some time, and after encountering many acquaintances, at last adjourned to a sumptuous lunch in Eaton Square, where Wilfred found Mrs. Digby, the picture of prosperity and kindness, and full of a water-party that she wanted to get up, of just the same half-dozen as last summer, and very much distressed she was to find that Wilfred would be out of town for some days. As for him, he did not fancy under the circumstances throwing the two ladies together with the many causes for disagreement, which, unseen by Mrs. Digby, had sprung up under her very nose since the original party a year ago.

Wilfred was quiet enough down at his sister's in Kent, and had plenty of time for reflecting on life and things in general. He had been getting lately more and more dis-

satisfied with the life he was leading, and he felt a greater disgust with himself at the little use he was in the world than he had felt for a long time. His close intimacy with such a mind as that of Lady Waldermere had raised him to a higher level, and had made him feel that there were other things in the world than the mere amusements of it. That the way to the highest happiness was not the path of idleness, and that even a man in his position could find duties to perform, and ways of being of use in the world. He had had a walk in the afternoon with his brother-in-law; and though he could not envy him his pursuits, which were of the most rural nature, yet he could see that he was in his own place, and in his own way, of great use to the country at large, and to his neighbours both poor and rich. The little narrow circle which he and his wife lived in would have been torture to Wilfred, but he saw how happy they were, taking the deepest interest in all their surroundings, and always occupied and useful, though London was almost as far removed from their daily life as the ancient city of Babylon.

. In the evening he could not fall into their early hours, so he found himself, after his

brother-in-law had retired, having given up as a bad job an attempt to appear awake over a late pipe, with two or three hours on his hands before he could turn in. His thoughts wandered away naturally to Lady Waldermere; and though he had left her so lately, he could not resist the temptation to pour them out to her in the following letter,—

“With the long silent hours of the night before me, in the quietness of this green and leafy spot,—where I am far from you in body, though so very near in spirit,—I have taken up my pen to invoke with it your sweet presence even more distinctly.

“I am not going to weary you with one word on the subject we talked of at the end of the evening when we last met, as I can say nothing pleasant about it, and in such a matter as that, truly ‘sufficient unto the day.’

“My ideas are now wandering away to far sweeter and far higher thoughts than the narrow and miserable opinions which the world might form, or the words it might use, if it could see indistinctly the shadow of the deep friendship, the great love; that exists between us. The possibility of my having to leave you has set me thinking more than ever

of what my love for you really is to my life, and of the change that it has made, and is making in me day by day, and week by week. Since I have known that you cared so for me, that my life was of such interest to you, I have longed so earnestly that it were more worthy of you, and that my past was one which could be looked back upon with satisfaction and with pride, instead of a succession of failures, and latterly of careless idleness. Inwardly I have been striving to make myself a little more worthy of a prize, of a happiness that I never dreamed of obtaining in my life, and when I reflect how terribly I am all that is the contrary, I hate myself. I have always tried, as you know, to let you see me, know me as I am in real truth,—as I can see my own self,—to let you know all the faults, all the weaknesses of him, whom you have so blessed with your regard, so that in no way shall you ever find that you have to discover some unknown and distressing flaw in him. I have, as you know, tried to lay my past life before you, and, avoiding those passages in the life of a man which, alas! his coarser nature, and the careless life of most young men lead him into, to let you know what it has been. When I

reflect on it myself, I feel how unworthy it is of being so looked upon by one so pure and so high-minded, and your sweet kindness in overlooking its faults, your indulgence of all its weaknesses, and your sweet affection which has stood the test of so intimate a knowledge, have increased tenfold the love and devotion I feel to you.

“ But I have in me now a longing to do something again in life, a determination to once again shake off this unworthy life of ease and idleness, and to do something worthy of you. I know I have powers in me, and I am now longing once more to raise my hand in the struggle of the world, and as you have singled me out of so many to be your special friend, to show that I am not unworthy of it. I dread seeming to make vain protestations of what I will do. I know too well how easy protestations are, and how little they ever mean ; how easy is the enthusiastic energy of a moment of excitement, and how hard the steady perseverance in hours of sadness and depression ; but I wish to tell to you, to whom I confess everything, the thoughts that are now burning in me, and to feel that I have your sweet encouragement in all my difficulties.

“I suppose the world would think it a strange idea, and an impossible fact, that what it would call the sinful love for the wife of another man can be anything but demoralising and hurtful. But how little it could know what it was talking of! how impossible for it to understand! To coarse, practical minds, which can never be raised to a higher world, love means little more than a physical companionship, the bodily sentiments predominate so much,—if they do not in reality constitute the whole of it,—that there is little difference to them between one man and another, and one woman and another. To those who cannot understand, the higher idea of love is the folly of an enthusiastic idiot; they smile, they pity, they pass on, and then they talk of the sin of it in a pharisaical mood; but the idea of its being a source of good, an incitement to an effort at attaining to a higher way of life, a purer condition of mind, is incomprehensible. Yet how true it can be! If you could but see the inner working of my mind, the struggles that have passed in it to cast out all the impurities of a careless life, to make it a fitter shrine for your sweet, pure image, you would see that some of your dear influence has not been

wasted, and now I am longing to perfect the work; and, if in future years I achieve a position, at least worthy of my name and what abilities God has given me, you will look on it with some satisfaction when you can feel that 'this has all been my work, it was for me alone, it was to become more worthy of me that these exertions were made!'

"You know how I have made you my confessor, how into your patient ears I have poured so much of my life, my thoughts, and my shortcomings, but you do not know the inward struggles I have had to let nothing enter my mind, or occur in my life, that I could blush to tell to you. The thought of you has become a part of me, I never hear or read any new idea without my first thought being, what would Hilda think of it! And in everything in life the sweet presence of Hilda is over all. And this has not come in a minute. It has grown in weeks and months, ever stronger and stronger; though in those early days, when I first felt your power, I strove against it,—yes, Hilda, I did indeed! I first thought I was safe against it, then I dreaded it, and many a struggle passed in me before I felt that you were my mistress, my queen

body and soul! I can remember so well saying to you that if I felt in danger of really caring for any one I would go far away, I would avoid the chance of it! I meant it really then, but with you it has been different. I know not when I first loved you; it has grown gradually into my life, imperceptibly, and now is a part of me, and it grows now, and deepens as time goes on. I know now that I am yours for ever. I know that, though I might be separated from you for life, I should be as much yours as I now am; and though I might see you no more till death, my happy spirit then set free would be with you and yours, never to leave it! I feel too that my love for you, Hilda, has to stand the test of hoping for nothing further in this world; that by the inexorable laws of fate we are hopelessly divided here. I can never be more to you than I am now, the most loving and the most intimate of friends. We can, alas! never hope to be united on earth. Mine, thank God! is not the selfish love that could ask you to give up honour, name, and family to gratify it; though I believe that few people have more of the elements in them for the highest and most intense mutual happiness if united, than

we have, even if I did not know the high moral purity of your soul made it impossible to imagine leaving home and honour for the most delightful dream of love, the most perfect, the most blissful companionship, I am not so lost to feelings of honour and true love for you, to let the thought of leading you to it possess my mind for a moment.

“Yet, how sweet the dream of life with you is ! though I feel that your spirit so far as it can free itself from its lovely tenement is ever near me, yet to have you in bodily form ever with me,—Oh ! my own loved Hilda,—to see your sweet face ever before me, and to hear your soft loved voice, would be bliss that no words, no pen can ever attempt to shadow !

“As I sit writing to you and dreaming of you, my own Hilda, the hours of the sweet summer night are slipping by, and I shall close these lines which will carry these imperfectly expressed words of love and gratitude to you. I shall go out into the soft scented air, and live over again all my thoughts of that night I spent in the park at Waldermere, after the moment when I first knew that the unutterable happiness of your love was mine.”

Wilfred finished writing and went out into the cool night air, and wandered about under the shadow of the old trees round the house. He watched the dark shadows thrown by them against the pale moon, and he thought of the fair scene he had gazed upon so short a time back under the same cold light from the terrace at Waldermere. As he paced up and down he thought deeply and earnestly of the past, present, and future, and tried to set his mind firmly to the life of work, the life of upward endeavour that he steadily resolved to lead.

The next two or three days passed quietly by, and Wilfred felt the pleasant rest of this peaceful abode, and enjoyed for a short time the contrast between it and his life of excitement in London.

He was very fond of his sister, and was amused at her numerous family, who were health and strength itself, and rejoiced in having him to bully and play with, and he had among his pursuits in the wilds learnt quite enough of farming to take an interest in all its summer occupations, which were now engrossing his brother-in-law.

At last there came a letter from Lady

Waldermere, and Wilfred felt a thrill of pleasure as great as any boy or girl on receiving their first love-letter. And to him it was his first love-letter, it was the first letter he had ever received from one whom he really loved in all his life, and he took it and hoarded it up till he could hide himself away in a quiet shady spot in the garden to enjoy his treasure.

“I have read your long letter, dear Wilfred, with the interest and the pleasure that you knew I should feel. It has filled me with many thoughts—thoughts both pleasant and painful. I have a quiet evening, I am thankful to say, so I mean to devote it to thinking of you, and to writing to you.

“It makes me both sad and happy to think that you love me so well. Sad because fate has decreed that I can never make your love more than a partial joy to you, but happy, very happy, because I do believe that it is ten thousand times better for a man to be under the influence of a real affection than to drift from one banal flirtation or *liaison* to another, gradually *épluché*-ing as it were every worthy

and high sentiment both of heart and intellect. I am proud that you wish to do something in the world, and worthy of yourself for my sake. I cannot tell you how I wish you would *do* something, even if it is only to occupy you; it seems so unworthy of a man, with capabilities and intellect, to lead the aimless, useless life yours is at present. If I thought it was from your fault and not from the inexorable weight of circumstances, I think, much as I care for you, I should at last school myself to indifference, perhaps contempt! I have such very strong feelings on the subject that I should rather part with you for a time, and think of you as doing a man's work in some far-off place, than to see you continue your idle and *demoralizing* life here! I wonder if it is selfish to wish to be proud of the man one loves? If so, I fear I am very selfish, for the greatest fight I have had with myself about you, has been the feeling that I was caring so dearly for you in spite of your not doing what you might to make your life of use and honour.

"I should not feel all this, and certainly not say it, if I did not believe you had it in you to become almost what you like if you

choose to exert 'yourself. It will make me very happy to think you will do for my sake what you have never found it worth while to do for your own, or anybody else's, for though you please to consider me superior to my sex, I feel myself a very woman in the love and worship I wish to have from you.

"Your dream of what life might be, of happiness that would be so great, but yet is impossible, is but too often mine also. Ah! how sweet a dream it is! Alas! that it is but a dream of fancy to suppose one can break one's chains in this world, and ever find peace and happiness! How few of us would remain in the straight narrow path, if the miseries of the poor creatures who have strayed away did not teach us, 'It's better to bear the ills we have than fly to others we know not of.'

"It is a nobler choice I believe, to shake off the deceit and treachery which are so galling to any really true nature, but, alas! in this world at least, the nobility of the motive does not condone the crime, and there is no paradise which could be made on earth, into which the thought of abandoned children and dishonoured home would not

steal to poison all the joys of realized passion.

“Do you think, it is not hard to love you so dearly, you the only man I have ever loved in my life, and to be the slave, body and soul—no, thank God, not soul at least—of a man I could never love! It is hard, it is a cruel chain, but hard, cruel as it is, it must be borne. This is the unseen, unspoken part of married misery, which makes existence almost unendurable. Still I have struggled on so far, and I must to the end. Thank Heaven! I can believe in your love, in your faith as in my own life, and I have my children always, whom I do truly love. I never thought them blessings when they came, the children of a husband I could never love, but my life would indeed be a blank without them, and without my little Hilda, who now sleeps so sweetly in her little bed close to my side.

“Life has many sorrows for both of us; and though materially to be apart will be a great trial to both, I believe our spirits will hold communion in spite of distance, and you will think of me as near you whenever you have

resisted some temptation, or made some exertion for my sake."

Before he had finished reading her letter, Wilfred's eyes were full of tears—tears such as he had never thought to shed again in his life—that flowed from an overpowering sense of the sweetness of the words he read, and of bitter remorse at the justice and truth of these reproaches on his past life,—so tenderly, so lovingly conveyed,—and the gentle encouragement for the future. Dead indeed must have been his heart, not to burn within him at realizing the fulness of the love of such a woman for him. Bitterly did he reproach himself for his past life of carelessness and idleness, for opportunities lost, and for sins and follies committed. Often in his wild and roaming life, as he had lain at night by the camp-fire with the wide and desolate waste of land around him, or from the deck of a ship in mid ocean had gazed up at the silent mysterious stars above him, had the thoughts of such deep love come over him, and the longing for some sweet gentle spirit, some true and pure woman to love him, and by her sympathy, by her prayers, to ennoble his life

for him. But it seemed then but as a distant and heavenly dream, the full sweetness of which it must fall to the lot of very few to realise on earth. But here it was all his own; the spirit from a higher sphere that he had then worshipped from afar had now come down to visit him, to bless him, to encourage him, and to hover ever near him. What was he that so great a blessing, such unspeakable joy should be his! That love as great as angels could, tell of, as sweet as poets could sing, should be poured out on him! Henceforth his life was no more his own, it was hers, it was to be consecrated to higher, purer aims than he had ever aspired to before; he would show her, he would prove to himself, that he was not so utterly unworthy of all that life had done for him. What an example to him was the sweet patience and courage with which she faced her secret trials, the bitterness and sadness of which he was the first to fathom. As he walked away through the bright sunshine, among the green trees and hedgerows, and the corn-fields tinged with the first golden promises of harvest, he felt as though a newer and a higher life had come over him, and that strengthened by the love of Hilda

Waldermere he would bear his part as a man bravely in the world, and would at least spend the rest of his life in the labour to make a place worthy of the long line of ancestors his family recalled with such pride, and not all unworthy of her.

CHAPTER VII.

WILFRED ST. JOHN returned to London after a few days, leaving the harvests of Kent to be gathered in without his assistance.

Before he left his sister's he had set himself seriously to think what his future life was to be. He had resolved that, at whatever cost, he would quite leave his present useless life, but what he should do was a most difficult question. It was a question however which he was determined should be answered before many months were over, and at any rate he would be, before long, "Doing something," if only to occupy himself, as his affectionate correspondent had so sweetly, but so impressively urged upon him.

All this he had to consider, and he felt also that he must either appease the wrath of Mrs. Addington, or dread her saying some-

thing which might embitter the lives of both himself and Lady Waldermere, and perhaps almost entirely separate them. How he cursed his folly and recklessness!" and how useless, and worse than useless now seemed all the well-known and well-used little sayings and jokes with which he had himself, along with many other men like him, defended and tried to justify the state of dangerous intimacy they were in the habit of living in, and amusing themselves by, with one pleasant woman after another, always deriding the idea that it could ever entail any penalty on them.

He certainly had taken pains to be very agreeable to Mrs. Addington, and it was possible that he had even intentionally led her to believe that he liked her better than any one else; but he had done the same thing before more than once, and each time he had done it, it had been easier to do, and he had thought less of the possibility of any bad consequences to himself. Now, the scales seemed to fall from his eyes, and he began to see the folly, and more than folly, of spending his life in false sentiment, and in playing with the passion of love, on his side, and in perhaps leaving the object of his passing amusement

with a weight and a sadness in her heart, and a bitterness in her life,—with another illusion dispelled, a little more of the bloom rubbed off the fair fruit of her young life, and with the whole tone of her character lowered instead of raised by his contact.

He felt now that it might be all very well for him to say that he had never carried things too far with her, but who could say how far he had lowered the principle of her life, had made the way easy for men—perhaps less skilful, and less refined than himself,—still, for men more unscrupulous. He might have been, as Edmond About so well expresses it, like the sportsman, who, though he may not bag all he shoots at, still wounds many a poor thing, which afterwards falls an easy prey to the foxes and the weasels. He remembered so well years before when travelling about in the South of Europe coming across a gentleman from New York, and staying at the same place, where he was amusing himself by trying to gain the affection of a fair dame, with no honourable object. He had left the place for a few weeks, when chance brought him back there again, and still the man was at his post of constant adorer. He had expressed to him his

surprise at his being still there, and had said, "What! you haven't succeeded yet in carrying off the fair Helen!" to which the gay Paris had made answer, "Wal, nò! But I calculate that I have pretty considerable lowered her moral tone!" The answer had amused him enough at the time, but he now thought within himself, with but little satisfaction, of the number of those whose moral tone he might have lowered, merely for the amusement of the passing moment. He could not help remembering with what reprobation he had spoken to Mrs. Addington herself, not more than a year ago, of those men who amused themselves by doing this very thing, and he had then held himself comparatively blameless. But now his eyes seemed opened, and though he could say, perhaps with truth, like the Pharisee, that others were much worse, and more unscrupulous than he was, yet he saw how little way that miserable plea carried him, and how much he had to blame himself for. Of his intercourse with Mrs. Addington he did not find much for which he could accuse himself, it had been but a drop in the ocean, another straw, but it seemed to be destined to be the straw that was to break the peace of his life

and to endanger a friendship and an influence which he felt would alter the whole tone of it. His sin was indeed finding him out at last, and a long 'career of recklessness and selfishness was now to be atoned for.

All these unpleasant reflections, coupled with his perplexity to know what to set about himself for the future, did not make his return to London a moment of unalloyed pleasure, but the thought that he should see Lady Waldermere was sufficient to make up for much that was most worrying and depressing. She knew his past life, and she had forgiven it.

He called on her as soon as he reached London, but she was out, and was not expected in till dinner time, so he went rather late down to Eaton Square, and determined to see Frank Digby somehow that day, even if only late in the evening.

He found Mrs. Digby in, and to his mortification heard that he had just missed Lady Waldermere. Mrs. Digby was alone, but dear Frank was to come in directly, of course he would talk and wait till he came. Mrs Digby was full of her water-party, and Wilfred was at his wits' end to know what to do, but it seemed inevitable. If they went, of course

it would be in the old way, *chacun avec sa chacune*, and he did not see who was to be his 'chacune.' Knowing what he did about the story Mrs. Addington had told of Lady Waldermere, he felt that a couple of hours in a punt with her would be unendurable. Till he knew that, he could give her always the benefit of the doubt, he could go on much as of old, but now he could never play the hypocrite sufficiently, yet here was Mrs. Digby running him into a corner about it to settle everything. He must leave it to Frank, his least word was law to his wife, and he had ready wit enough to manage it all. So he said at last to her, "Well, Mrs. Digby, we will settle all about it when Frank comes in," to which she assented. Frank, however, tarried so late that it was clear he would only come in just in time to dress for dinner, so Mrs. Digby asked Wilfred if he was not engaged, whether he would as soon join their *tête-à-tête* dinner as dine at his club, and to this arrangement he easily enough assented, as it ensured him a long talk with Frank, as well as a very good bottle of claret to moisten their wit. He departed therefore at once to perform the operation of dressing, and eight o'clock found him crossing Belgrave

Square in the gondola of London on his way to the Digby mansion.

“Delighted to see you,” said Frank, with a most cordial shake of the hand. “I am so glad that my wife asked you to stay; she finds me a bit dull all alone,” he said, laughing, “and she thinks that a little return to Bohemian days is pleasant now and then.”

“Bohemian days!” exclaimed his good lady. “My dear Frank, how can you talk of my Bohemian days? Now Mr. St. John has known me for years, and I am sure he will wonder what time of my life you can be talking of.”

“Well, my dear, days of freedom, if you like the term better,” said Frank, “but Wilfred, who knows us both so well, can understand; and if my days can be called Bohemian now and then, I only took the liberty of giving yours a sympathetic term.”

“Anyhow, Frank,” said Wilfred, “it is no use for the likes of us to be squeamish about terms, we both know pretty well what the word Bohemianism means.”

“And you, poor thing, are still a Bohemian, you mean?” said Mrs. Digby.

“Rather so! rather so! my dear lady,”

said Wilfred half laughing, "my anchor has not been cast yet, and I fear I shall long survive many of my brethren."

"Oh! don't you be afraid, old man," cried Frank, "we shall have you anchored fast enough by-and-by. If you like, I and Alice will look out for an anchor for you."

"Thanks, very muchly," he answered, "it will be a good amusement for you, and it will do me no harm."

"And who knows," said Mrs. Digby, "that we may not find the right one? I should be so really glad to see you happily married."

"Most kind of you," said he, "and I can assure you that I fully second your wish, but the adverb must qualify the participle if you please, and I am afraid that to carry out the 'happily' will be a more tedious operation than you will care about."

Wilfred could not help thinking to himself, "If she was always so anxious for me to be happily married, I wonder she did not encourage me a little more to call her to help me to the happy state; however, she has a much righter man in the right place than I should ever have been."

While they were talking, the stately gentle-

man announced that dinner was served, and Wilfred gave his arm to his old friend to take her down to dinner. He could not help thinking to himself as he went down the wide staircase, lighted as brilliantly as though they had a banquet that evening, and through the hall into the large dining-room, hung with the beautiful pictures collected by the late lamented uncle, what his feelings would have been if he were now the happy possessor of it all, and of the lady hanging on his arm,—and then the idea flashed across him, of wondering if she ever in her heart thought of marrying him, or if it was only his vanity that had led him to think it. But he was not allowed much time for meditation, for his two friends required him to talk, and had all the little gossip of the last few days to repeat over to him.

The dinner was nearly as good as it could be, Mrs. Henderson had always understood giving a dinner, and now with the accession of fortune, Frank had added for her to the establishment the best French *chef* he could find. They were waited on by two serious men in plain clothes, and three in uniform, black velvet shorts with gold garters, and gold

buckles in their shoes; their coats were very plain, but most neat, and Frank had got them to brush their powdered hair, which was rather long, back, to resemble as far as could be a pigtail, which he would have had them wear if he could have found men to do it; as it was, he said he was just going to add one to their coat-collars, as the only substitute still possible.

"I always had my ideas of how things should be done in a house," he used to say, "but I never imagined that I should have the chance of carrying them out." If accused of extravagance in servants, he said that he had no house in the country, and no hunters to keep up; and if his fancy took this turn, why, it was cheaper than hunting, and footmen did not break down and go lame."

The conversation at dinner was not on any subject of particular interest, and the perfection of the waiting made it go rather quickly. Mrs. Digby left them in the dining-room, saying she would order coffee upstairs in the back room, where they could smoke as much as they liked, but that she would leave them to talk for a little alone.

After a few words about the claret, which

was quite all Wilfred's delicate palate could desire, Frank said to him,

"Have you come to any further conclusion about the subject of our last talk? I speak of it, as I am sure you mean to allude to it."

"You are quite right," answered Wilfred; "I certainly wanted to talk to you again, but, you see, I have been down in Kent ever since I saw you, and so I have seen no one whatever. I want now to ask you if you can throw any further light on the matter, and then to talk to you about this party for the river, which your good wife is so keen about getting up."

"Well, then," he answered, "first, as to the wrath of the goddess, I fear I can enlighten you but little. She has said nothing to my wife, and she almost jumped at the idea of the party at Maidenhead; she quite gushed, as far as Mrs. Addington ever condescends to gush, at the idea of a repetition of our old party of last summer, and said she should be delighted to meet her dear Hilda and Alice again. She is a curious woman, and like nearly all of them, very hard to make out."

"They're 'kittle cattle,' indeed, as the old

Scotchman said,' remarked Wilfred. "It's quite a fact that in any mess or difficulty where men are concerned, 'there you are,' but with women, why, 'where are you?' I don't believe any man born knows what they may be up to next."

"No, that he don't," said Frank. "I'm sure we've both had some little experience of the dear creatures and ought to know; and when I hear a man laying down the law, and saying exactly how a woman will act under any given circumstances, I always put him down as a conceited ass. Men are much more alike, and go by rule; you know nearly always what a man will do in a particular case."

"You see," said Wilfred, "a woman doubles round on you when you least expect it. She will do the most brilliantly generous thing, and then something which we in our coarser nature think rather a shabby trick. They are nearly always in extremes. If they have an impulse for a thing, bang! they go for it, and by Jove more often than not they get it, when we should be standing or thinking it impossible."

"And the way a clever experienced woman sees through a man, or another woman for that matter," said Digby, "is a real caution.

I don't believe we should ever take in even the young ones if they kept their heads, or their hearts—same thing—one acts on the other. If you want to come round a woman, my experience tells me not to reason with her, except to amuse your time and occupy her attention, but to excite some passion in her, and work on that. Of course the one of love is an old well-used story, but it will not do by any means always, and a man may not be in that line a bit. But he may work on her vanity, her jealousy, in fact on any one of the passions, the bump of which is well developed in the fair creature; ambition is a capital string to pull, but if a man knows his business he will generally come round her. You can lay down no law, however, they are all different. Still the principle is, 'appeal to their passions,' not to their reason, if you want to circumvent them."

"The same argument holds good though with many men," said Wilfred.

"Oh! no, not half so much," he answered. "Almost every man is proud of his powers of reasoning, and a very clever man will often work him round, and persuade him that he is saying just the contrary to what he means ;

now that you will never do with a woman. A clever woman is the most perfect diplomatist as long as her passions are not roused, that is her stumbling-block, but if she keeps her head, and her temper, you will never see her hand; now a man almost always shows his in the long run. If the Lord did not give them strength, he gave them cunning, there's no doubt about that."

"Well, let's leave the sex in general, and come back to one Bessie Addington in particular," said Wilfred. "About this blessed party, what's to be done? I really cannot punt Mrs. Addington about all the day, after what I know she said to Mansfield, and I don't like to offend her more if I can help it."

"I don't see that it can matter two brass monkeys whether you offend her a little more or less now," said Frank; "of course if you meant to go on your knees again to her, and cut the other one, she might take you back, but I don't think she would. Anyhow you don't mean it, so in my opinion you need not bother your head about her, unless you like to take the punt over the weir, drown her, and take your chance of saving yourself."

"No good that," said Wilfred, laughing,

“she swims even better than I do, and that is saying something, as you know. But I think you are right about the offending idea. I have really more in my mind at this moment, the awkwardness of the party, and how likely it is to hang fire so.”

“Oh! don’t you bother your head,” he answered. “You take my ‘missis’ in a punt, I will take the fair offended one, she has no grudge against me, thank God, and leave Fitzroy to the beautiful cause of all these tears; you can spare him an hour or two, can’t you?” he said, laughing; “and I dare say after dinner you will find an opportunity for a word or two, but I wouldn’t hang back from the party now, for I believe that all the rest have arranged to come.”

“I suppose then that it’s settled,” he said; “and you will *débarrasser* me as much as you can of the fair one who now frowns so upon me.”

“I think you will find it all much simpler than you expect,” said Frank. “Why you have yourself been allowing that clever women do not show their hands to the first-comer, or for that matter to the last; and we have here to deal with two uncommon clever women, who are

neither impulsive girls, nor rustic unpractised matrons from the country, but your real ladies of fashion, to whom it is far more easy to conceal a feeling than to show it. ' Now I'll bet you, you will see that they will be more light in hand, more talkative and more brilliant than they were at our party last year, each will make an effort to appear perfectly unoccupied with anything, and they will succeed. Lady Waldermere will know what's up well enough, whether you have told her or not, but neither my wife nor Percy Fitzroy will see anything. I certainly don't mean to tell my wife; she is such a kind ' good soul, she would be very much pained at a 'split between two people she is so fond of, and all on account of—well—”

“ On account of a scamp like me, you mean, old fellow, out with it,” said Wilfred; “ I am sure Heaven knows, and I myself too, that I am not worth it. I should have thought I had done mischief enough in the world without making these two women quarrel ! ”

“ You will live through it,” said Frank, laughing, “ and you need not put on such a melancholy face. I have no doubt before a year is over that you will be talking over a

new mess with me. We have both of us had a knack of getting into them, but we do get out again in some wonderful way always. But now just polish off that bottle, and we'll go and make our peace with madame for staying here so long."

"It's all very well for you, Master Frank," he said; "you talk like the man on the firm shore to the friend struggling in the waves. You feel quite sure I shall land safely, but you cannot make me feel the same certainty, nor can you, luckily for you, feel the waves which toss me about, or taste the mouthfuls of salt water which I am perpetually imbibing."

But all Wilfred's miseries did not prevent him thoroughly enjoying his last glass of most excellent Bordeaux, or make the model of an arm-chair, into which he sank by the side of Mrs. Digby a few minutes later, feel hard or uncomfortable; he could thoroughly appreciate that the mind and body are two, and that though the mind may be very uneasy, it is by no means a bad thing to have the body in peace and comfort.

The rest of the evening passed quietly away. It amused Wilfred very much to have this peep into the domestic life of his two friends

and the more he saw of it, the more he felt the wisdom of Mrs. Henderson's choice of a husband, and was satisfied about the security of their happiness. It might not be one of his ideal unions, but there was great affection between the two, which was evidently growing stronger ever day, and Frank Digby cared more for his wife than Wilfred had believed it possible, till he was at last beginning to think that there was more truth in the words he remembered of her letter to him, just after her marriage, telling him that she was Frank's first real love.

Frank's amours had been numerous, violent, and brief; he had none of Wilfred's imagination and sentiment, but fire and passion had always formed a very large part of his character, and he had in days gone by let no obstacle that could be possibly surmounted stand in the way of a caprice. But there was no caprice here, and though there might not be quite so much of the impetuous fire which had warmed his loves of younger years, there was more quiet affection, and much more hope of durable happiness. As for her, she had with her usual impulsiveness given herself body and soul to him, and there seemed

very little doubt that, as her friends had prophetically remarked, she had found the contrast between number one and number two, enormously in favour of number two.

Mrs. Digby was delighted to hear that they had discussed the party to Maidenhead, and had settled it all finally ; she had not been down there that summer yet, and she said she wished so to revisit a place which would recall so many delightful souvenirs, and make her feel even more strongly how much happier she was this summer than last.

The evening was delightful, and the three friends sat till late in the evening, enjoying the soft night breeze as it came to them through the open windows laden with the perfume of the masses of flowers which filled them.

Wilfred departed at last, and he took with him some of the cheerfulness, and feeling of calm tranquillity of his hosts. He was in his heart rather glad that the party had been arranged ; it made him feel as though there was no irreparable breach yet which might not be bridged over, temporarily at least, and then he would be near Lady Waldermere for so many hours, and he had but little doubt

that he could manage, somehow to find an opportunity for a long talk with her. Anyhow he would go and see her the following day ; and if he could only find her alone, he would learn all she thought about it, as well as hear whether Mrs. Addington had shown any further sign in his absence.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE following day Wilfred received a letter from Lady Waldermere, telling him to come to luncheon when he would find her alone, as Sir Henry was going down to Waldermere Park on some business. Half-past one o'clock found him in the well-known library, where he was rapturously received by his two small friends and their faithful companion.

"Look at Brebis, Mr. St. John," cried little Hilda; "she was shaved yesterday, and isn't she lovely! Her moustache gets longer and longer, I believe it's as long as yours, quite."

"Does it tickle as much when you kiss her, Hilda?" he asked, laughing.

"Oh! but I only kiss her woolly head," she said, "it's *your* moustache that tickles so. Oh! don't; I shall scream if you kiss

me like that," she cried, as he caught her and gave her a practical demonstration of the tickling powers of the silky moustache, which, to tell the truth, he was particularly proud of.

"When you've finished that innocent amusement," said Lady Waldermere, coming into the room, "perhaps you will ask me how I am, and then come in to luncheon. And you've tumbled your hair so, Hilda, you ought to go up to the Lum-lum again and be smartened."

Little Hilda, however, protested successfully, and shook her silky curls into place again, while they went into the dining-room.

"I was sorry I missed you yesterday," she said, "but I was out till quite late."

"And I just missed you at our friend's house in Eaton Square," he said. "I dined there afterwards, and we had much talk, as you may suppose, about the whole world in general with the dear Alice, and you would have been amused and edified to have heard me and Frank discussing after dinner the nature of woman, *apropos*, first of all to a friend of ours, and to a certain party on the

river which I am told is among the things that are to be, and about which I want to talk to you presently."

Personalities were, however, postponed till the little creatures had been fed and despatched, and they were comfortably settled among the flowers in the shady little conservatory looking over the park.

"Do you remember when we were sitting in these very chairs here, just a year ago, Hilda?" he said. "What a strange difference in every thing this year has brought?"

"It has, indeed," she said. "I wonder if the possibility of our present intimacy ever then came into your head."

"The possibility of it," he answered, "never came into my head till it was a fact; the idea of the delight of such a thing crossed my mind very early in the time of my knowing you. But I have often longed to know, only I have never dared to ask you, when *you* first thought of me as at all worthy of your notice. That sweet lovely face of yours, and that soft voice which expresses your ready wit, form a mask behind which it is impossible to penetrate. Once or twice in the early days at Glen Dhu I fancied you liked me, perhaps

a good deal, but you drew back again so quickly that I thought it was either my mistake, or that you only did it to amuse yourself. For do you know, *ma dame*, I have made the little discovery that you have not been above being amused by the admiration which you have excited in unfortunate man."

"Have you, indeed!" said she, laughing. "Why, did you think I was made of some different flesh and blood to other women? Yes; I have been very much amused before now by the story of his woe, which has been poured out to me by some infatuated admirer. I have been amused, but I have been bored too more than once, I can tell you. There is after all such a sameness about it, you men nearly always say just the same thing; there are the two classes, the timid and diffident, and the bold and dashing, but that's about all the difference, the individuals of each class *se suivent et se ressemblent beaucoup, mais beaucoup!*"

"And I too, *ma plus chère*," he said, "did I too resemble? and may I know my class?"

“Do you think that you are different to all other mortals?” she said, smiling.

“And are such scenes as one we well remember, also every-day occurrences?” he said, in a low voice, leaning forward and kissing the tips of her little fingers which rested on the arm of her chair.

“What do you think?” she said, looking into his eyes with the most tender and loving expression.

“I don’t think, dear,” he said softly, “I am sure, but that scene is too sacred to me to be made a joke of. I don’t know why I said that.”

“I know you did not say it seriously for one moment,” she answered. “Of course, I have liked some of the many men I have known, better than others, but not one of them has ever made my heart beat quicker by his coming or going. I have, I confess, rightly or wrongly, amused myself much and often with them, but I never gave one of them the least encouragement. I never once yet said, ‘Dilly, dilly duck, come and be killed!’ They all came waddling up quacking in a string, and at times two or three together. Oh! I cannot help laughing sometimes at the

scenes I have witnessed! Three men, all as different as men could be, all doing their utmost to be charming to me, and looking at each other like three strange cats in a garret. And their efforts at sitting out each other! I have been reminded of a rustic proverb about the silent animal getting the food; the silent cat can generally stay the longest, the ones who talk must be talked out at last, and to see the look of fury they give at the one who remains; and all the time each one never dreams that I can be bored, and sometimes afterwards he commiserates me about his having been obliged to go, and leave me to the mercy of perhaps the very man I wanted. Truly some of you lords of creation seem to think that every woman must be flattered by your twaddle!"

"There are lots who do," he answered, "but honestly my conscience does not prick me on that score. I have always felt that there are many men just as agreeable as I am, and I never in my life played at sitting out unless I had had a hint to do it from the lady, and I certainly then always tried, as you say, to make the man talk himself out; if one is only stolid enough, it is bound to succeed.

But we have wandered' off' in to such light subjects that you never/ answered part of my question."

"The exact date of my first viewing you with a favouring eye," she said, smiling, "That, sir, is among the pieces of information which I do not intend to favour you with at present. Whatever answer I gave you, I should run the risk of either hurting your susceptible feelings, or of making you conceited. But you said at lunch that you wanted to say something about the Maiden-head party, didn't you?"

"Yes," he answered. "Mrs. Digby, and Frank too, say that they have arranged to have a repetition of our party of last summer, and that you have agreed to come. I was at a loss to know exactly what to do, but I talked it over with Frank, and I found that I could not get out of it, so I said yes."

"But why should you get out of it?" she asked. "You're not afraid to meet Bessie Addington, are you? I'm sure I'm not, and I said I would go at once. I am not going to alter my ways in life one inch for her, or any one else. It will amuse me very much to meet her there and see what line *she* takes."

You men always, when it comes to the point, seem much more afraid of everything than we are."

"I don't know that I'm afraid exactly," he answered, "but I thought how awkward it would be if I should have to punt her about, and I did not know what I should say to her all the while, after what she said to Mansfield the other night."

"Why, you might make love to her again," said Lady Waldermere, laughing. "I am sure you ought to know the *rôle* pretty well by this time. I should like to watch you doing it from afar."

"Don't be too hard on me," he said, looking very penitent, "I know I have been a beast in days gone by, but I am really changed. Anyhow I want to arrange with you what we shall do down there. Of course, I want to see as much as I can of you, and I want you to tell me how much that can be. Frank suggested that we should begin by my taking his fair lady, and his taking the injured Bessie. But what do you say?"

"Well," said she, considering a little, "perhaps that would be as good an arrangement as any; and if the evening is very dry and warm, possibly I will let you take me a short

distance after dinner. How would you like that, sir?"

"You know how I shall like it better than words can tell you," he replied; "but do you know,—it may be very foolish of me,—but I cannot manage to feel that perfect confidence in the impotence of the wrath of that good lady, which you manage to feel. Suppose she were to rouse the feelings of Sir Henry in any way, might not that be very unpleasant for both of us?"

"I've never seen Sir Henry touched by the sting of the green-eyed creature yet," she answered, "and when he is it will be time enough to worry about it. No! I am resolved that, come good or come evil, I will not be vexing myself with any fears of danger that may not exist. I can never see any good in discounting one's miseries. They are bad enough when they come in all conscience! The coward dies a hundred deaths, and the feeble-spirited and apprehensive suffer all their miseries half-a-dozen times over; now once is quite enough for me, but I have always seen that you are fond of foreseeing all sorts of contingencies, and making yourself unnecessarily uncomfortable about them. I am sure

you never did about ~~for~~ more real dangers in your past life."

"Very well, I will follow your example, my beautiful Mentor," he said. "I cannot follow a better, and we will let the future take care of itself. I do not certainly see why I should not enjoy the delightful present to the utmost. I have you here, my own sweet Hilda, all to myself, and if we do discuss the future, it shall be a very different sort of future to the worries and vexations which the malicious tongue of any man, woman, or child can cause us."

"You will find yourself much happier for it," she said; "and for my part, I shall find you a much more cheerful companion, for, as I am to be a grass widow for a short time, I mean to honour your lordship with a considerable amount of my company."

"Shall I break my leg again?" he said, smiling. "I'd willingly break both of them to spend another three weeks in the house with you,—how delightful it would be now!"

"What, the broken legs?" said she, laughing. "You must have a strange idea of what is delightful in life! But I much prefer you with two sound ones, so please to keep them

in good order just at present, for I want you to dance with me, and to make yourself generally useful."

The happy pair tallied on among the flowers in the cool shady little conservatory, and till late in the afternoon let all thoughts of the outside world fly far away from them; while in the delightful charm of each other's presence, every care and every trouble disappeared, and they lived only for the present moment of happiness.

The next two or three days were delightful, and Wilfred and Lady Waldermere saw as much of each other as it was possible to without living in the same house. She was quite determined to show how she laughed at anything Mrs. Addington might do or say, and Wilfred was continually at her house, joined her at the opera, and one afternoon she drove him down to the Crystal Palace, where they arranged to meet the Digbys, and have tea while looking out on the roses, and far away to the glorious view over Kent and Surrey.

On the afternoon of the day agreed upon for their party at Maidenhead, the same six, who had met at the same station a year before,

were once again upon the platform. They went quickly down the well-known line, past the distant towers of Windsor, and found their three punts waiting for them under the willow on the lawn at Skindle's. Not one leaf or flower in the pretty scene there seemed to be altered, the hand of time which had so changed the lives of two of the party, had pressed lightly enough on the pleasant old river and its surrounding beauties.

The Sunday crowd was absent, and there was a calm quietness over all. Two or three people who were about were evidently staying in the hotel, and there was a shy-looking couple, who, Frank Digby discovered with much amusement from the waiter, were a honeymooning pair staying a week at Skindle's; and he brought a rebuke upon himself from his wife by saying that he had always thought it was *de rigueur* to come down to Maidenhead with anybody's wife but your own!

The hour of dinner settled, and the party having paired as had been agreed upon, they started leisurely up the river through the lovely scenery of which it is impossible ever to tire.

Wilfred was such an old friend of Mrs.

Francis Digby, and upon such pleasant easy terms with her, that he was at no loss to make up an amusing conversation all the way up. She talked of herself, of her Frank, and of the intense happiness of her present life. It was easy to see how pleasant she found the contrast between being married to a man like Frank Digby, after her first most uninteresting partner in life ; and in spite of herself it came out so strongly that Wilfred could not help thinking of the words of the poet, and that she now felt herself 'wedded to a man, not half mismated to a yawning clown !' Poor old Frank ! he certainly was a man whatever his failings might be. His adventures abroad and at home would have made a most interesting, if not instructive book, and the things he had turned his hand to, and the shifts he had tried to make a living, always with enough success to keep his head above water, would have astonished some of those people who think that a scion of an old family once stranded must lie there till the waves of society knock him to pieces unless his friends repair him and set him afloat again.

Much chaff and amusing talk they had, and in her kind simple-minded way, Mrs. Digby

was very anxious about his future. No doubt in her secret heart she knew that she had entertained the possibility of marrying Wilfred, and in good truth it was only at the last moment at Nice, when Frank came so energetically to the point, that she had made up her mind to make him the happiest of men. Of course, she could only conjecture what Wilfred's feelings might have been, but she was quite sure that he had seriously considered the possibility of asking her to be his wife, even if he had not ardently desired, it, as she had sometimes flattered herself. But now that all that was impossible, it was much easier to talk to him in a most confidential style, not to say that she did not adopt an air which was a little parental, so that she amused him by the tone of the advice she gave him. It is fair to say she was not inclined to give advice that was *unpractical*, or *impracticable*, and she was quite ready, if he would have accepted it, to back up her advice by helping him to the capital to embark in any enterprise in which he might see the road to fortune.

The three punts met together in the loch, where there was time to exchange the usual badinage; and Frank Digby, whose tongue

had all through his life been ready, whether his wit was on the spot or not, maintained such a running fire that there was no danger of the short time there seeming to hang fire. He was on at his wife with all sorts of little jokes, quite in the old anti-matrimonial style, and he was determined that Percy Fitzroy should not relapse into the silent superior form that he was sometimes inclined to adopt, so he 'drew him' to any extent about some fair lady, either real or imaginary, whom the lively Frank chose to declare that Fitzroy had spent the winter running after. This well worked naturally 'riz' the dignified Sir Percy tremendously, and to be chaffed about it when in the society of the lovely Hilda Waldermere was very trying. She told Wilfred afterwards that the efforts which Sir Percy Fitzroy made to exculpate himself, and the way she amused herself by chaffing him, occupied the greater part of their voyage.

Tea at Cookham was again the halfway house of the afternoon, and the party was then joined by some friends who were having an afternoon ramble in a steam launch, and the addition of three or four more to their party prevented the repetition of many of the old

jokes which were now household words in the little set.

The downward journey was begun at last, and in the lock at Cookham various allusions were made to the story which Wilfred had told them the year before about castles and knights of the round table,—under the trees at Taplow; but Wilfred was in no humour to tell stories, even if the party wanted another legend of the Thames, and said that he had long since hung his harp on a willow-tree, and had retired altogether from the profession. They floated slowly down the lovely piece of river between Cliveden and Formosa, a spot which men, who have visited all the beauties which the magic of the tropics can produce, always return to with fresh pleasure, and fresh admiration, which has too over all the delight of being at home, and is to so many endeared by the sweet remembrance of delightful hours which have been spent on that soft flowing river, and under those deep delicious shades.

As they went on, each of them took their own time about the journey, and stayed to rest under whichever shady tree, or in whichever soft nest of bullrushes seemed most inviting; and all passing the lock separately, they did

not rejoin each other till they were together on the lawn at Skindle's.

As Frank Digby had predicted, the dinner was particularly lively, and certainly Mrs. Addington did not allow any trace of latent feelings to check the flow of her talk, or shed the slightest shade of coldness on anything she said to Wilfred or to Lady Waldermere. The party was decidedly a success, and no stranger could have guessed that among these six people, who were discussing all that was at the moment going on in London, and who laughed so often and so brightly at the many amusing things said and stories told, there was such an intense under-current of feeling. Lady Waldermere and Wilfred St. John bound together by the closest ties of affectionate friendship, Mrs. Addington hurt and offended with both of them, Sir Percy with his vanity as well as his feelings most strongly engaged in the pursuit of Lady Waldermere, Frank Digby looking on, and giving Wilfred a helping hand when he could, and Mrs. Digby, the good-natured friend of the whole party, who could see no harm in anything or even guess that all did not run as smoothly as when they were on that very spot together a year before.

They had coffee on the lawn, and Wilfred had purposely left his punt with all the cushions in it lying close to the edge of it. The evening was delightful, a warm long evening in early July, soft and refreshing, without the slightest chill, and yet with no sultry feeling whatever. It was very much such an evening as the one on which Wilfred had sat at the feet of Lady Waldermere for the first time in his life, and there he was again. The scarlet geraniums opposite were in the full blaze of their glory, the bridge was reflected in the still water, and there were two or three men moving about in the garden of the Guards' Club next door; the same old colley dog was taking his evening walk round, and came up to Wilfred, as he called to him, as an old friend. "What Speedy! old dog, are you still loafing round on the loose, why don't you go home to your mistress, you old sinner!" The unsuccessful punter was not there, but the honeymooning couple were starting on an evening trip, both looking rather guilty and conscious.

"What do you say to a short turn on the water, Lady Waldermere?" said Wilfred to her, "it looks delightfully soft and tempting."

"Yes, if you like," she answered, "I'll come for a little way," and turning to the others she said, "I am going on the water again for a little while," and without waiting to hear what they said, she let Wilfred help her into the punt, and they started up the river.

Wilfred did not go very far, but as soon as they had got to a quiet spot, he made the punt fast and sat down near Lady Waldermere.

"At last," he said with a sigh of relief, "we have escaped from the world for a brief space, and I have you here all to myself, my own Hilda!"

"Do you feel so very happy at it," she said in a low voice.

"Don't ask me to protest," he answered; "you know when I begin to protest, like most men I become rather absurd, and instead of impressing you, you often laugh."

"I won't laugh this evening," she said; "I don't feel in a very laughing humour."

"Why, was Percy Fitzroy too much for you this afternoon?" he said. "I thought he looked anything but pleased at Frank's chaffing him about his amours abroad in the winter."

“Sir Percy was very much in the protesting humour, if you like, on the journey down,” she answered. “He became quite rampageous, and was going to drown himself and me too, first one, then the other, and then both! ’Tis a gentleman of a fiery ardour indeed! But I am tired of him, don’t let’s talk of him any more.”

“Are you really in a serious mood, dear Hilda?” he said. “Shall I tell you what is now occupying my mind so very much? It isn’t anything to do with our party down here.”

“Yes, tell it me,” she answered.

“I am thinking, and I have been thinking so very much lately,” he said, “of what my future is to be. You cannot know how deeply those sweet kind words in your letter went home to me, and made me feel what a useless unworthy wretch I have grown into. I had so easily and insensibly given up any effort in life, and I saw around me so many other clever and most agreeable men leading just the same sort of life, that there never seemed anything in it at all to be condemned and despised, till I really knew you. Then you, with such an air of almost frivolity, and

with almost the ways of a coquette and a flirt, but under it all such a depth of feeling and of high principle and earnestness, came and made me see myself as I am. If you were a man, Hilda, I can feel to what a position you would have raised yourself. You have all the wit and charm that captivate the world, and all the energy and earnestness that succeed in it. Can't you give me a little of your secret? I am so eager, so anxious, that your wish so lovingly expressed, that I would do something to make my life of use and honour, shall not fall on barren ground, or that those hot bitter tears, yes, Hilda! tears of bitter remorse for the wasted past, and of gratitude for your sweet love, should not have all been shed in vain. To every man I believe there comes a last chance in life, and mine has come—work I must.”

They were both silent for a minute or two after Wilfred had done speaking, and at last Lady Waldermere said,

“I should be sorry to think that any words of mine could have given you pain, but I felt so strongly that I could not help speaking. You know how seldom I speak seriously for fear of not being understood, but you I knew

would understand me. In spite of all you see in me of apparent frivolity, I have, thank God, a deep feeling of the real earnest duties of life, and I long so to see you doing something to make me respect you as much—as much as I love you dearly now,” she said almost in a whisper. “If you will work and for my sake, you know how much I shall value it. But what you think in me to be two natures is but one, it is only that I am really a woman, *le femme la plus femme*, as a very clever man once said to me some years ago, when my character was rather easier to read than it is now. All those curious shades and changes are not inconsistencies, they are the real nature of a woman who has strong feelings and passions in her both for good and evil. Would you rather have me a sort of half creature, all serious, or all frivolous, instead of what I am?”

“You know that it is because you are what you are, that I love you dearly,” he answered, kissing her little hand that was lying on the cushion by her. “I would not have you changed by one little tiny atom, body or mind. Hilda—but,” he went on, “if you will help me it must be practically, and by helping me

to decide what step I shall take in life. I am very poor as you know, and it is no use my thinking of struggling for a public career; if I were as clever as Pitt or Lord Palmerston, money to a certain degree is absolutely necessary for the first step in a parliamentary career, and that I have not. Business remains,—that wide indefinite term which embraces everything from keeping a lollipop shop, to swindling the public by starting bubble companies." I am ashamed to say that I have wished sometimes that I wasn't honest, I could so often have made money in some of my by-gone adventures. Even now I might sell my name and social position to some of the speculators. It is thought nothing of now, the most respectable men lend their names to men who ought to be on the tread-mill, and so cause the ruin of widows and orphans, but if they only make money, the friends they have made (of the Mammon of unrighteousness) will open all the doors down every fashionable street in London to them, and their doings will be chronicled in the morning papers as though they were benefactors of their country, instead of deserving a few feet of state rope."

"I certainly don't want you to dream of doing anything which you could ever for one moment blush for; remember, Wilfred, that I feel we are so closely united now that your shame would be my shame, and I wish to be proud of you! But there are many things, which, with your abilities and your experience, you can do. The beginning must be hard; and as you said to me yourself, it is in the persevering struggle at the beginning where the true courage is needed. You must now wait for your opportunity, only be ready for it, and then you must work and wait for your success. And remember that the truest proverb there is, is that *Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre*; and when in sorrow and doubt, in sadness and depression, think of me! and of these words which I am now saying to you! For the rest, for the present moment, why don't you write? I am sure you can, it will occupy you, and I so wish to see you occupied; I do indeed, and it will be most useful work for you."

Wilfred thought for a few minutes, and then said, "I have written very little in my life, and I hardly know what to write about, but I will try it if you recommend it. But what shall I write about?"

“Why not write about your own life?” she answered. “I don’t mean so much your desperate adventures and hairbreadth escapes which you have so captivated the children with the account of; you will never do that as well as Captain Mayne Reid, but about your social life here in England, and about the people you know? Of course, I don’t mean to make it personal, but write a novel of life as it is, and not as some people imagine it to be.”

“May I bring you into it?” he said, half laughing.

“If you do you must wrap me up so that my dear mother won’t know me,” she replied, “but I should be rather amused to see your view of my character.”

“Very well, I will really do it,” he said, “so that is settled; from to-day I work steadily to get some honest business to which to devote myself, and in the meantime, I write your novel.”

They were silent for a few minutes, and Wilfred was looking tenderly into the soft beautiful eyes of his companion, which looked larger and darker in the deepening twilight. The evening was one of those perfect summer even-

ings, in which the day melts so softly and so gradually into night that through the long twilight it is impossible to trace any division between them; when the air is so soft and fragrant, and all nature around looks so beautiful that mere existence becomes a pleasure, and the enchanted Englishman feels that if England were always like this, it would be the most delightful place in the world to live in.

"I have been thinking so much the last few days," Wilfred said at last, "of what I shall do, if it seems absolutely necessary for me to go abroad to do whatever fate brings me as my future occupation. It seems so hard to tear myself away from all that makes life delightful."

"Hard indeed!" she answered, "but you have now so perfectly decided that work is to be your future, that I must not encourage you to shrink from anything which may clearly seem to be what you ought to do. You know how hard it will be for me to part with you, but you know that, for our sorrow, part we must at times. Remember how many a man has at the call of duty left everything which is dearest to him, and has perhaps never returned again."

“I trust,” he answered, “that I shall never shrink from my duty. I have now but one object in life, to make myself worthy of you. It seems so curious to me now, do you know, Hilda? and such a change from the past, but all women are now to me almost alike. I used to look upon every agreeable woman I met with interest, as a possible future intimate acquaintance, and often when I saw some unusually pretty or interesting face, I used to amuse myself by weaving some romance with her as the heroine; but every feeling of that kind has been banished from my life, and I now see you only everywhere, and you are ever with me. If I must leave England, will your sweet spirit ever follow me; and when sad and weary I lay myself down at night, shall I feel that you are ever near me?”

She held her little hand out to him which he kissed passionately, and she said, “You know what I feel and believe, Wilfred; you know that I have accepted your life as mine, and I feel such an infinite trust in you as I never before in life believed that it was possible to feel in any living being—such a perfect reliance; I *know* that you are mine for ever! Ah! how hard! how cruel! are these worldly

ties which prevent me from being wholly yours! How little do girls of the age I was when I married think what fetters they may be forging, and how bitterly and vainly they may curse them in later life! But how little use it is to curse what we cannot escape from! Let us enjoy those blessings and delights which we have; and at this moment, here in the darkness of the night, I feel as though we were alone together in the world."

"Yes," he said, "these are the moments of our life which make it endurable, all the spaces between are a dreary blank, only partially lighted by a recollection of our love, and by that feeling of the communion of spirits which we both so deeply believe in."

How perfectly delightful to them that soft balmy evening was! That beautiful woman lying on the cushions in the dim light of a late summer's evening, with her face so pale and her eyes so wonderful and large, seemed to Wilfred like a being come from another world to bless his life, and there he sat by her, and watched her as the time passed so quickly and deliciously by, while they enjoyed that delightful converse of perfect love, and perfect trust and mutual understanding.

How long they stayed they forgot to take any count of, they were both so happy that they could have lingered on there side by side for ever, when suddenly Wilfred's attention was called to the flight of time by the distant scream of an engine, and the distant noise and lights of a train passing over the railway bridge.

"Good heaven!" he exclaimed springing up, "that can never be our train," and then looking at his watch he turned to his companion, and said, "By Jupiter it is! What on earth are we to do!"

"You don't mean that we've missed the last train?" said Lady Waldermere.

"I do indeed," he answered; "if our friends delayed it ever so much at the station, we could never catch it. Will you ever forgive me for being so stupid! but I was so happy, I forgot that time existed."

"It's no use my blaming you," she answered, "and I suppose it is as much my fault as yours, but we must get to London somehow to-night, and I must show myself at some hour at that good lady's ball in Belgrave Square, which I never intended going to, for if I don't, the chaff of our friends

will be trying to even my indifference. It is very tiresome, but I would give something to see the faces of the rest of our party, and hear their remarks!" she added laughing.

"If you can laugh like that, *ma plus chère*," said Wilfred, as he was pushing the punt rapidly towards the bridge, "I don't feel quite so miserable, but I feel as though I ought to be whipt for my stupidity. We must get to the station as quickly as we can and telegraph for a special train; we're sure to get one."

They were very soon at the lawn in front of Skindle's, where they found an excited waiter expecting them. He informed them that their friends had been in a terrible way about them, and had waited till the last minute, and that there was now a fly waiting for them.

"Well, we must go up to the station, and see what is to be done; what a pity we cannot stay quietly down here, and telegraph to London to say we will come in the morning," said Wilfred.

"I am afraid we have tried *les convenances* to the utmost," said Lady Waldermere; "what a bother they are! But are you sure we can get a special?"

“Oh, yes ! I think so, but we shall know in a few minutes. What a pity it is,” he said as they were going to the station through the dewy fields, “that the old posting days are no more ; what fun it would be galloping up to London in a post chaise and four ! I should feel as though I were eloping with you in the most regular and approved manner. Those railways have destroyed all romance.”

“It will indeed be a pity that there are no post horses if we can get no train,” she said ; “fancy crawling up to London in a series of flies ! Why, it will take all night, and get to London somehow we *must*.”

When they reached the station they found the station master looking out for them, as their companions had told him how they were too late. He had already sent up the line to know if there was a spare engine with steam up, and he found that there was one at Windsor, which could be there in a few minutes, so that their anxiety was soon relieved, and they made themselves comfortable to wait for the train, after telegraphing up to Lady Waldermere’s carriage at Paddington, to wait for her till their special arrived.

“I should be amused,” said Wilfred,

“when Percy Fitzroy goes to your carriage, to say that you are not coming, to hear the faithful Wilson tell him with that perfect politeness which he is such a master of, that he has a telegram from her ladyship to say that she will be there in a few minutes. The faithful has a great regard for me, and he has a wonderful respect for me too since I rode the kicking colt at Waldermere without a saddle. What delightful days those were at the dear old park! Shall we ever have them over again, Hilda?”

“Many times, I hope and trust,” she said. “But I confess I should be curious to hear observations of our friends on us on their way up to London.”

“Fitzroy will never forgive me,” remarked Wilfred; “he don’t love me now, and he will hate me with a good royal hatred for the future. I like being hated by some one I don’t like much, but then when you have got three to one the best of a man, you can afford to let him hate you as much he likes.”

They sat together on the deserted platform, and were by no means miserable or depressed, till their train arrived, when they departed in solitary state for Paddington, flying through

the fresh night air, and the meadows bathed in white mist, at more than forty miles an hour.

They found on arriving at Paddington that the train which they had missed had been delayed, and that they were there a very few minutes after it, and the carriage was waiting there for them with the faithful Wilson, who had a smile lurking about the corner of his mouth as he told them he had shown the telegram to Sir Percy, who had come to him with the other ladies to say they had had to leave Lady Waldermere behind.

They were very soon in Park Lane, and Lady Waldermere said, "I shall make haste in my dressing to be at the ball before the fair Bessie, so don't you lose any time, but be there ready to receive me."

Wilfred was dressed, and at the ball waiting about to see if Lady Waldermere did arrive before her friend, which she did, and they both had the amusement of watching her face as she came into the room and found them dancing together. Mrs. Digby arrived too before the dance was over, and they went up to the two together, and both burst out laughing, at the rather long faces they put on.

"Did you think we were drowned, or that we had embarked for Australia?" said Lady Waldermere; "you gave no orders about having the river dragged, we heard on our return."

"We knew what excellent hands you were in, Hilda," said Mrs. Addington. "We knew that no one ever yet came to harm in the care of the correct and careful Mr. St. John."

"Nor have they to-night, Mrs. Addington," said he; "you see I have delivered my charge here in good time, and perfectly undamaged."

"So it seems," she said with rather a sarcastic smile, "but the risk of damage from the night air in a punt is considerable, and so some people think. I trust that Hilda has not taken any cold which she will suffer from afterwards, and make her regret her rashness."

"She is not much given to repentance as you know," said the lady spoken of, "and she does not take cold easily; you know she learnt a long while ago how to take care of herself."

"No doubt, my dear," answered Mrs. Addington, "but even the most careful make little slips now and then, and have to repent

some little imprudence. And I am sure that there are many people who will think it imprudent to sit in a boat in the mist till so late at night that they have to come to London by special train. But let us trust that no harm will come of it."

"I haven't much fear, I assure you," said Lady Waldermere, laughing, "but whether I have caught the cold or not that Bessie is so kindly anxious about, by being upon the water so late, I have got very hungry, so come Mr. St. John and give me some supper."

"War declared openly, *ma chère*," said Wilfred as he led her to the supper room, "that fair dame means to make good use of to-night's mishap. But she was unnecessarily coarse in her remarks."

"I still defy her," said Lady Waldermere, "but she is a great bore. Ah, you men! why must you go trying to deceive so many poor women! Now, too late, you have learnt that as you sow so must you sometimes gather the fruit!"

Lady Waldermere had supper, and having talked a little more to Alice Digby and also to Sir Percy Fitzroy, who had come more to see if Lady Waldermere really would appear.

or not than for anything else, and was evidently in a very bad humour, said that she was tired, and went home before very long. Wilfred went back into the house after putting her into her carriage to show that her leaving did not make him go away immediately, and was very much amused at Frank Digby's account of the exclamations and remarks of the other three as the time had gone by and they had not appeared. His wife had been truly and good-naturedly vexed at what she knew would be a considerable annoyance to Hilda, but Mrs. Addington had, to Frank's great amusement, vented her spite by exciting the jealous feelings of Percy Fitzroy, till that most self-contained gentleman was nearly bursting, and he could see had to make violent efforts to prevent showing his anger. "I think that your ears must have tingled once or twice," he said, "for she made some uncommonly strong remarks about your absence there in the dark. I was very much tempted once or twice to ask her if it was her own experi-

she and Fitzroy were both disappointed when they found that the coachman had a telegram to say you had got a special and would be there very soon ; I am afraid that you must look out for squalls."

"I am afraid so too," he answered, "but I am rather sleepy after so much fresh air, and shall take myself off to bed, so good-bye!"

And to bed Wilfred went to dream of a punt on a moonlight river, with the most beautiful woman in the world in it, of galloping post chaises, and a wild mixture of elopements, of implacable enemies, of dangers, and of happy escapes from them all.

CHAPTER IX

THOUGH Lady Waldermere and Wilfred parted assuring one another, and while the excitement of the evening lasted, really feeling pretty sure that the past would have no evil consequences, and that the future had nothing unpleasant in store for them, yet the next morning's reflections did not quite bear out the overnight's confidence; and if they could have seen Mrs. Addington, when she took her cup of tea at the early hour of nine thirty, their feelings would have been still more foreboding.

That fair lady was not generally given to waiting long when she had once made up her mind about anything, and she had now made it up that she would strike a heavy blow against the unhappy pair who had so incurred her displeasure. She felt pretty sure from

what she knew of the Waldermere *ménage* that her dear friend Hilda would not be likely to see much of Sir Henry early in the day, and if she did intend to tell him of her little adventure of the day before, she would not do so till the afternoon or evening. After reflecting on this, she determined that her first move must be to try to see Sir Henry, and casually to tell him of it.

Sir Henry, who had just returned to London, was a man of regular habits, and twelve o'clock saw him and his cob in the Row as regularly as the sun marked the hour, so to meet him there would be her first move; what was to follow next must be a little decided by how the Baronet took her intelligence in the way she meant to put it. So she ordered her horse to be ready at twelve o'clock; and after taking another soft doze, inspired by a peaceful mind and a conscience at rest, she raised her graceful form from the bed and prepared herself for the day's social duties.

The month of July was advancing, and the world of London was flitting or was talking of it, and none of the friends meant to stay much longer, and when Mrs. Addington reached the Park, the diminution in the crowd of fair

riders there was very easy to see. She had a good canter first to clear her head from any of the latent effects of the hot rooms of the night before, and when she reined in her horse not far from where Sir Henry was progressing slowly along under the trees near Albert Gate, talking politics to an old friend, she was conscious that her colour was brilliant, and her eyes sparkling in the dangerous way whose power she knew so well.

She nodded to Sir Henry, who left his friend and joined her at once as no one was riding with her, and after answering the few complimentary speeches which he as an old beau poured out on her, she began her attack.

"We had such a delightful day yesterday, Sir Henry," she said, "the weather perfection, and the party all pleased with each other. Hilda was in her glory, and looked so pretty, it is only a man of the old school who could have fascinated such a woman as her."

"I am glad your day was satisfactory," he answered, "though I cannot say myself that I should care much for a water-party, and a compliment to my wife from a lady with the charms of Mrs. Addington cannot be without its value."

"Frank Digby and 'his dear Alice," she went on, "were the most affectionate couple; it is delightful to see married people who seem to find the holy state such a perfect success."

"I trust that many besides them find it a success," he answered; "you know what a high feeling I have about its duties and its position."

"I hope Hilda's carriage did not have very long to wait for her at the station," continued Mrs. Addington; "when we left Paddington she was expected very soon."

"I don't quite understand you," said Sir Henry, turning towards her with a look of surprise. "I thought that you all reached it together?"

"Oh! Hasn't Hilda told you yet?" she exclaimed, putting on a meekly guilty look. "I thought that you were sure to know of her little mishap, but, as nothing came of it, I dare say that she did not think it worth speaking of."

"Her little mishap!" said Sir Henry, evidently not knowing what to think or say. "I have scarcely seen her to-day, but she told me that she had been at Lady Marston's ball last

night after your party; so I did not think there could be anything much amiss with her."

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Addington, laughing, "there was no accident, and I should not have mentioned it only I thought you were sure to have heard of it from her, but she could not tear herself away from the fascinations of the river at Maidenhead till rather late."

"But I don't see any mishap," said Sir Henry getting a little annoyed, "or why the fascinations of the river should keep her earriage waiting at Paddington. I suppose she came up with the rest of you?"

"Well," answered Mrs. Addington with apparent reluctance, "as I have told you so much, I suppose I had better finish; but you see the charms of a punt on the river, and the pleasant society of Mr. St. John, were so absorbing that she missed the train, and had to come up in a special."

"My wife! Lady Waldermere, coming up in a special train alone with Mr. St. John," exclaimed Sir Henry, startled for the moment out of his usual imperturbable dignity. "No, I had not heard of it! But," he added, recovering himself, "I shall see her at lunch, and I have no doubt she will tell me about it."

"I thought she would have been sure to tell you about it at breakfast," said the fair Bessie, who knew that Sir Henry and his wife never breakfasted together in London, "or I should, of course, have left her to tell you; but you know, Sir Henry, those little *contre-temps* will arise, and she is not the first fair lady who has found the moonlight on the river too fascinating. I can assure you I know of no such charming and delightful place to have a long intimate talk to a dear friend as a punt on a beautiful night on the river."

"Doubtless! doubtless!" said Sir Henry, "but I am quite sure that Mrs. Addington's discretion at least would not make her leave her party and miss her train."

"Oh! don't be too sure of that, Sir Henry," she answered, laughing, "if I had had you, for instance, with me last night, I don't know when I might have reached London!"

"At least," said he, "I trust I should not have so far run the risk of compromising a lady as to keep her with me till the last train had left. Suppose they could not have got a special train? and that might have very easily happened; I cannot think of the consequences!"

“Oh! Sir Henry,” replied the lady, smiling at him, “you forget the easy-going days in which we live; nothing is thought of that sort of thing now, and every extra pretty woman has a right to a little extra admiration.”

“I know, Mrs. Addington,” said he, “too well what you are really like, and what you think in your heart, to take your words literally; but it is getting late, and I must be trotting home to lunch. We shall meet again very soon I know, so *au revoir!*” And, taking off his hat, Sir Henry trotted off in the direction of his house.

Mrs. Addington put her horse into a canter and had one more turn up the road, very well satisfied with her morning’s work. She knew Sir Henry’s nature enough to know that the least idea of any indiscretion on the part of his wife would rankle for a long time in his mind, and would bear very bitter fruit in due time. “I’ll teach them to cross my path!” she thought to herself as she rode quietly home to luncheon. “I think now, my proud and immaculate lady, I’ll have you down on your knees before very long!”

Lady Waldermere was much too sensible a

woman in every way not to have decided to tell her husband of her little adventure of the evening before; and for more than one reason, but naturally chiefly because she was pretty sure he would hear it talked of by some of the party, and she had not done so in the morning because she had only seen Sir Henry for a minute or two; and did not think it worth while to detain him then to tell him.

Sir Henry rode back to Park Lane in a frame of mind altogether new to him. Jealousy, in the ordinary sense of the word, he was not likely to feel. His feelings towards his wife were not at all of the strong and personal kind which make a husband feel so bitterly the idea of his wife loving some other man.

He had, before he married, lived in his younger days the life of pleasure which the young men he was thrown with in early life used to lead, and had worshipped at the shrine of Venus with no inconsiderable devotion, and when he married his beautiful and charming wife he had quite enough of that part of man's nature in which sensuality predominates over sentiment, to feel very fully the charms of the woman whom his money and position had bought.

But he had been married long enough, and had arrived at a time of life when that feeling had cooled down; and while he still regarded her as his personal property to the full as much as is the habit of British husbands, and, for that matter, of most other husbands, to regard the wife whom inexorable fate has bound to them, there was very little of the lover in any sense of the word left in the feeling. But though his passions might have cooled down with age, yet his sense of possession had grown in proportion; and though after the fashion of almost all husbands, he thought it quite unnecessary to take the trouble even to make himself agreeable to his wife, he felt furious at the idea of her swerving from her loyalty to him in the slightest degree. He had always felt that the honour of being the wife of Sir Henry Waldermere was so great that it was impossible for any other feeling to interfere with the sense of it in his wife; and now, though the feeling which Mrs. Addington had suggested to him took no definite shape as yet, it ran on at the pace with which a new idea only can in a rather stupid man's head, into which ideas come but seldom.

He had reached his own door before he had

in the least made up his mind what he would say to his wife, and found himself in the library in her presence before he was hardly aware of it.

If he had taken a little time to consider, even he would probably have waited a little to see whether his wife would have told him ; but he was a hot-tempered man, the weather was warm, and his ride had not cooled him, so he began at once with his grievance,

“I hope you enjoyed your party on the river yesterday, my lady. I am sure you ought to have.”

“Yes ; it was as pleasant as those parties usually are,” she answered, seeing at once that he had heard all about it and was breaking out. “But why should you think it ought to have been unusually pleasant ?” she asked, looking up at him with her large fearless eyes.

“Because to have made you the talk of London, it ought to have been something very pleasant to be worth such a price,” he answered.

“Which means, my dear Henry,” she said, in the quietest voice possible, “that you have met Bessie Addington this morning, and she has told you that I and Mr. St. John made a

mistake in the time, and missed the train, and so had to come up in another just after it; it certainly cost considerably more than the necessary fare, but that could not be helped under the circumstances."

"You take it coolly enough, my lady," said Sir Henry, trying to put in a sarcastic tone. "I suppose you would like to make out that the few pounds which a special train cost, are more of a consideration than the character of my wife when all London is talking of her travelling about the country alone with a young man like that."

"All London is not talking of it, and I don't see why any one should be talking of it, and even if it was I cannot see anything so dreadful about it," she answered. "I should have naturally told you of it myself at luncheon, and I cannot understand why you make a fuss about nothing like this."

"*You* may think it nothing if you like, madam," he replied, getting more angry, "but *I* do not; and since this is your view of it, I will take care that you have no more midnight excursions with Wilfred St. John. I see that I have been a fool to let you always do exactly as you like, and like all fools I am

now paying for it, but I have come to my senses at last and I will take care to let you see it!"

"I think," said Lady Waldermere, getting up from her chair and drawing up her graceful figure in the most haughty manner, "I think that when you have cooled down a little, Sir Henry, you will take a more sensible view of this nonsensical affair, but I must now go and give the children their dinner."

"You may pretend to take it mighty coolly if you like," said Sir Henry, "but I will make you understand that the honour and credit of my name and my family are not to be lightly called in question, and I don't choose to have my wife's name the talk of every drawing-room and club in London. I see that I have let you and Mr. St. John go on very much too far, but since you cannot take care of yourself I will do it for you, and his intimacy for the future shall be at an end. I will take good care of that, Lady Waldermere!" and so saying Sir Henry strode out of the room in a still more angry frame of mind than he entered it.

Lady Waldermere went into the dining-room and gave the children their dinner, but

her scene with her husband—the first real scene which they had ever had—had completely taken away any desire for luncheon; and while outwardly perfectly calm, she was inwardly a prey to every feeling of anxiety and alarm for the future. She knew Sir Henry's character well enough to see that her old pleasant intercourse with Wilfred St. John was at an end, and that henceforth, for a long while at least, their meetings must be few and rare. She felt a sudden blight upon her life, and a feeling of vague apprehension which she could not shake off.

Sir Henry came in presently, and ate his lunch in silence, while little Hilda and Flossy did all the talking.

After it was over, Sir Henry went away without saying another word, and Lady Waldermere was left alone to her own thoughts.

A feeling of bitter resentment against Mrs. Addington was the first thing which crossed her mind, and of utmost astonishment that when it came to the point she could be so ungenerous, and then came up before her the thought of the long future, and the absence of the one face and the one voice which had taught her how

delightful life might be, and as she mused over that she could not resist the wish to sit down and tell him who had been so dear to her of the danger to their future which had that morning risen up; so she wrote him the following letter, determining to leave it at his house when she went out.

“I must write you a few lines, my dearest Wilfred, to tell you of the trouble I am in about our little adventure of last night. Sir Henry came in at lunch-time, having seen Bessie Addington in the Park, who had told him all about it, and I doubt not had made a very nice story of it for him. I never saw him so angry since we were married, and the worst of it is that his resentment falls so much on you that he vows you shall no more be my intimate friend.

“This is what troubles me so; and at this moment while I am writing I cannot collect my scattered thoughts at all,—I can feel the dismal blank that the future of life without you will be. I can write to you, but how can I hear from you? and when shall we meet again when I have left London! and how seldom even when I am

here? Oh! I don't think that till this moment I truly realized how sweet your love was to me, and now I must lose, not that, thank Heaven! but must lose your constant society which had taught me at last how delightful life can be! I feel quite bewildered, and don't know what to do. Not that we have anything to dread, for Sir Henry cannot have any reason to suppose that you are more to me than a particular and valued friend, but I know him well enough to be sure that he will exclude you from the house as much as if he knew how dear you are to me. I fear that we were living in a fool's paradise which the malice and spite of Bessie Addington has been able now to drive us out of; we were wrong, or rather I was, to underrate her power to injure us. I will only send you these few lines now to tell you to be sure to come to my box at the Opera to-night, where I shall be alone, and where it may be we shall have the last chance of talking over the future, and to tell you also, my dearest, how I wish you were here now, that one touch of your loved hand might reassure me and help to give me a little courage, which in truth, in spite of my seeming confidence, I sadly want. If I were now

saying farewell for more than a few hours I don't know what I should do. I shall leave this at your house myself.

“Your own HILDA.”

By the time her letter was finished and one or two little notes on trivial matters written, and herself prepared to face the world, the carriage was ready, and she drove to Piccadilly and left her note at Wilfred's house. Then after driving about for some little time, and doing some of those small commissions which help to make an object for the afternoon's drive, she was going slowly along by the Serpentine when she saw Wilfred himself taking a solitary walk there. She stopped the carriage and he came up at once, and was warmly greeted by the children and Brebis, while Lady Waldermere said, “I have dropped a note at your house to tell you to come to my box to-night; I want to speak to you,” and she then added quickly in French, “it is really serious, but I can't say more now before the little people.” She then drove on, and Wilfred hurried off to his chambers to get the note and see what he could learn from it.

Mrs. Addington had gone home from the

Park, and while eating her solitary luncheon she was meditating on the course which future events would take. She could not help laughing to herself when she thought of the expression on Sir Henry's face while he was struggling between his feelings of anger and annoyance, and his sense of his own dignity; and she tried to picture to herself the scene which must have ensued when he returned home and met her dear friend, Hilda.

A little later she ordered the carriage and went out, and on her way to Bond Street as she was going up Piccadilly, she passed the carriage of Lady Waldermere just as she was sending her note into Wilfred's house, and so engaged was that lady that she did not see her dear friend Bessie as she drove quickly by in the crowd.

"Oh my lady," thought Mrs. Addington, "so you are sending dearest Wilfred a line to tell him of the little scene which has just taken place in Park Lane. How I should like to see what you have said!"

The desire had no sooner occurred to her mind than the same demon prompted her to think how very easily she might manage to gratify it, and so as soon as she had finished her

business in Bond Street, without waiting to consider what she was doing, she gave orders to drive to Wilfred's house.

"Ask if Mr. St. John is at home," she said when the carriage stopped, and in a minute Wilfred's servant came out to say that he was out, and had not been in since the morning.

"How very unlucky," she said, "for I want so particularly to give him a message, may I go into his room and write two lines?"

Of course she might, and in two minutes she was in his pretty sitting-room, which she knew well from having been to tea there, and Wilfred's servant left her there to write her note.

On the table lay a letter in the pretty handwriting which she knew so well, and hastily scribbling two lines to say how sorry she was not to find him, as she wanted particularly to ask him to lunch the following day, she caught up Lady Waldermere's letter, left hers in its place and hurried out, not feeling any great desire to be caught there by Wilfred. She found his servant waiting for her at the foot of the stairs, and she just told him that she had left her note there, and then getting quickly into her carriage, she said "Home!"

What the mixture of feelings was which passed through her mind, while she was going there as fast as her two beautiful steppers could take her, it would have been very hard to describe. She felt that she was doing the most dishonourable thing she had ever done in her life, and one which nothing could justify, and more than once she wished the note safely back on the table, but there it was safe in her hand, and when she found herself in her own little room and alone, it was still there.

Curiosity, spite, revenge and one or two others of the little demons which prompt so many of the disgraceful things done in society, united too strongly for any good influence to make itself felt, and without further reflection she broke the seal and had the open letter in her hand.

Quickly she ran her eye over the lines, and as she took in more and more their contents, she felt the hot blood rush to her face and then leave it, and as she finished, and stamping her foot on the ground with rage turned round towards a looking-glass, she was almost frightened at the white face which she saw there.

“So! my proper and virtuous Hilda! My

pretty piece of propriety who never committed one indiscretion in all your life, here is your accepted, your acknowledged lover! and all this going on under my nose and hardly suspected by me! *Mais, je te tiens! Ma plus chère amie!* Bessie Addington's malice and spite indeed! I'll show you what they are like, and wake you up out of your fool's paradise with a vengeance! And this is the man who so short a time back would have had me believe that he loved me! *Bon Dieu!* And she to come up to me at the ball last night with her modest and innocent air, and his kisses still hot upon her lips; he who told me he could never wish to kiss any one but me in his life! But I have you both now," she said half out loud, walking up and down her room, "I have you both *there*," and she stamped her pretty foot on the ground in her rage. "You who underrated her power to hurt you! Oh! you did underrate her? and you laughed together at her impotent jealousy, but *my* turn has come at last and you shall both remember it to your dying day!"

Mrs. Addington paused for a moment while making up her mind what to do, and then sat down quickly at her writing-table,

and taking a plain envelope, in a round small text hand she directed it to Sir Henry Waldermere, Park Lane ; and reading over once more Lady Waldermere's unfortunate letter, she put it inside and fastened it up; she then rang the bell and telling the footman to post it at once, she went down to her carriage, and proceeded with her drive to try to cool herself down a little.

Wilfred reached his house and ran quickly up to his room, and there on the table he found Mrs. Addington's note and no other. He broke it open and ran his eye over its contents and then rang his bell, waiting his servant's arrival with desperate impatience.

"What notes have come for me?" he asked.

"Two, sir," was the answer. "Lady Waldermere left one, and then Mrs. Addington came, and as you were out she wrote a note for you here at your own table."

"Which came first?" he asked.

"Her Ladyship's note came first," answered his man.

"And where did you put it?" asked Wilfred.

"On the table, sir, just there," he replied.

“Oh ! very well, that will do,” said Wilfred, to whom the horrible facts of the case were only too clear.

He then sat himself down and looked out over the Green Park to the distant hills of Surrey, and thought what was to be done. What was in that letter of Lady Waldermere’s ? He would see her to-night and then he would learn, but what would Mrs. Addington do with it ? How impossible it was even to guess ? Of course she would read it, and on the contents of it would depend what she would do. The suspense was dreadful. He knew that Mrs. Addington would not be particular what she did, but he was not prepared for such a coup as this ; and how she could have possibly known that the letter would be there he could not imagine ! Had she only guessed it and come on the chance, or could she have a spy ? but that was impossible, as there would not have been enough time, but be that as it might, he felt that the climax was come. What there might be in Hilda’s letter to him, written after some serious scene with her husband, it was impossible for him to conjecture, and as yet he could only guess what that scene was about,

but that he and the events of the day before were the cause he could not doubt. Then as he sat there the sweet past came back to him, and he once more lived again those delightful hours he had passed in her loved presence; but then came the stern present, and the shadowy and dark future, and a heavy foreboding of evil would steal into his mind; and he tried to see what could possibly be done if the very worst came, but the more he tried to see down the future, the darker it became. If he destroyed the peace and happiness of his Hilda's home, and peace there was and a certain sort of happiness with her children, what could he offer her instead! What might she not have put in her letter, and what conclusion might not Sir Henry draw from it if Mrs. Addington sent it to him as he only too much feared she would? He scarcely dared think of it; the words in the letter which he had prized so dearly came back to him but too distinctly. What happiness could he offer in exchange for the ever present thought of dishonoured home and abandoned children! But it had not come to that! and it never could! But still he sat by the window, and looked far away into the dim distance on

which the shadows of sunset were beginning to fall, while below him rolled on the endless stream of carriages, the ceaseless crowd of passengers, each bearing the burden of their own joys and sorrows.

At last he roused himself from his dreams and prepared to go to the opera, and learn the worst from Lady Waldermere's own lips.

CHAPTER X. ,

SIR HENRY WALDERMERE found himself much troubled in his mind what part to take for the future. He had lived so long in the same grooves that any change would be most irksome to him, and he could not find it easy to change in anything the courteous manner which he had been always in the habit of using towards his wife. That evening he felt that a *tête-à-tête* dinner with her would not be endurable, so he left word that he should dine at his club, and she was left alone with the children to keep her company during her solitary meal.

Little Hilda was unusually bright that evening even for her, and made more funny little affectionate speeches than ever. One thing Lady Waldermere afterwards remembered her saying,—“Mamma dear, I don’t like Mrs.

Addington's horses half so much as yours, and she had no nice black Brebis in the carriage with her; had she, you darling!" she added, kissing the woolly head of her familiar spirit which was sitting by her side.

"Why, when did you see her horses, my dear?" asked Lady Waldermere.

"Oh! she passed us as we were stopping in Piccadilly; and though they go fast, they are nothing like our dear Phantom and Flyaway, Wilson says they are the best pair in London this year."

And so she chattered on about anything; and when the time came for her mother to go, she could not give her kisses enough, and seemed as though she would never unclasp her arms from her neck. But at last Lady Waldermere gave her one more kiss, and departed for the sad talk she was to have with Wilfred St. John at the opera.

He had kept his eye on her box, and she was barely settled in it before he was at her side.

"Hilda," he said at once, "I have a dreadful piece of news to tell you; it is no use concealing it a minute from you, as you must hear it. Mrs. Addington has stolen your letter to me!"

Lady Waldermere looked at him, and repeated his words with a look in which surprise and alarm seemed to prevent her saying anything for the moment.

“Yes,” he went on; “it is too true. When I got home I found a note from her with some banality in it, but no other on the table where my man had put yours so short a time before. She must have guessed somehow that you were leaving a letter there, and came in with the excuse of writing to me, and stole it! Yes! stole it! Can you remember what was in it?”

The whole scene of the day then came back to Lady Waldermere; her angry talk with Sir Henry, her depression, her letter, and then what little Hilda had said about Mrs. Addington passing them as she was leaving her letter in Piccadilly.

“There was only too much in it, I fear,” she answered; “and Heaven knows what she is not capable of doing with it. Oh! Wilfred, what is to be done? I thought that the separation from you, which her malicious talk to my husband this morning would cause, was quite enough without this dreadful blow. I feel lost, and am quite in the dark what to do!”

“But, my own dearest,” said Wilfred, “what was there in this letter which frightens you so much. You only wrote to tell me to meet you here to-night; there is nothing in that.”

“Oh, no! I wrote it in a hurry, and I was so upset by the scene I had just had with Sir Henry that I did not stop to consider my words, and I fear it was a letter which, if it fell into his hands, would lead to— Oh! I don’t know what,” she said, looking up into his eyes with a look of despair. “To-night, Wilfred, I feel as though the end of all things had come. I could scarcely get away for the kisses of my darling little Hilda; and now, what sort of home may I not be going back to? This suspense is terrible. What can I do!”

“But, dearest,” said Wilfred, trying to reassure her, “why take so black a view of everything. Mrs. Addington could never give your letter to Sir Henry, and this other storm will soon blow over, and we can meet again as much as ever.”

“You speak lightly enough of it,” she answered almost bitterly; “but, then, you are a man,” she added.

“Oh, Hilda! my own love! If I try to

“speak lightly, it is but to try to encourage you. God knows what I would not give to take you to my heart this very night for ever, and there shield you from all the storms of the world. Hilda, if you had no ties, no children, and no mother, I would say to you this very night fly with me! Leave for ever this land, and this husband whom you never loved, and who never loved *you*, but only admired that beautiful body which holds your own dear self! To leave him would be no sin; the sin is in the cruel fetters which a hard world has forged for you. But how can I say it! I love you too dearly and too unselfishly. You know that I am yours, yours for ever, but to bring misery and misfortune on you would be too terrible.”

“But,” she said, “what is to be done? The worst may come to the worst; and if Sir Henry gets that letter, I don’t know what he may not suspect, what he may not do! Think, Wilfred, think how pressing is the danger; think what I may not find when I go home this very night.”

“Hilda,” he answered very slowly, and looking into her beautiful eyes now so filled with care and anxiety, “will you trust to me? I never before saw you so troubled; it used to be always you who gave me advice;

you who calmed my troubled spirit ; now it shall be my turn, and whatever comes, you will trust me, and know that whatever I do shall be done entirely for you, and without a thought of myself. What trials we may have in store who can say ; but come what may, nothing can ever shake our love and trust in each other."

While they were talking so earnestly and trying to reassure each other, and to hope that there was peace where they could see no peace, the beautiful music of Faust was filling their ears unheeded. What to them were all the miseries of the many Marguerites who have found the trials and temptations of life too much for them ! They had between them a love as deep as any Faust and Marguerite, and their minds now were as full of the dread that the cold cruel world should know of that love, as those of any unhappy lovers had ever been ; while the gay and brilliant house round them looked carelessly into their box, and only one or two of their dear friends smiled at the interesting conversation they saw was going on there.

Suddenly a quick step was heard outside, and the key of the boxkeeper turned in the door ; in another minute Sir Henry Waldermere stood before them.

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There was no need to look twice at his face to see that the fatal letter had reached him, but he seemed for the moment to be taken aback by seeing Wilfred there; for as he knew that he had not got the letter, he expected to have found his wife alone.

He had come in early from his club and had found the letters of the last post, and among them addressed to him, in a hand he did not know, the one his wife had written that very afternoon. He had read it over once without fully taking in its meaning in his astonishment, but soon it flashed across him, and from the unguarded expression of deep affection in it, he took its meaning to be the very worst. What should he do? What should he vent his rage on? Without thinking more, he sent for a cab and hurried off to the opera, expecting to find his wife alone in her box. What he had intended to say to her he scarcely knew, but, at the sight of the two sitting there, for a few moments his anger prevented him speaking.

Wilfred half got up to meet him, hoping that it might be possible in some way to avoid a scene, but he saw in a moment that any attempt would be useless, and it was quite

evident that his unexpected presence had made matters ten times worse.

"So, my lady," he began, trying to assume some of his usual dignity, "I find you here with your *dearest* Wilfred. I trust you are having a pleasant evening now you have got all that makes life pleasant with you. I am sorry to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*. I thought I should have found you alone.

"Oh! pray don't let me *derange* you," he said as Wilfred was getting up. "We seem to be quite a proper family party: husband, wife, and lover. All quite *en règle*. Oh! don't move. I have nothing to say to her ladyship which you cannot hear." And then, turning to her, he said in a voice hoarse with anger and emotion, "Hilda! you will never darken the door of my house again. Don't interrupt me, I know all. At last, the veil has fallen off and I see you as you are. Nothing shall induce me to let me set your foot inside the house you have disgraced again. As for you," he said, turning to Wilfred, "I trust you are contented to look on the misery and disgrace you have caused."

"Mr. St. John, please leave us," said Lady Waldermere. "I must speak to my husband.

He is mistaken, misinformed. I must explain to him, "she went on quickly as Wilfred went towards the door.

"Why should he go?" said Sir Henry, who had roused himself and was speaking in a cold sarcastic voice. "What explanation can you have to give which he may not hear? He will swear to any lie you like to tell!"

But Wilfred passed by Sir Henry and out of the door; and, as he passed by him, he said, "Sir Henry, you are mistaken, and you will one day bitterly repent your haste."

"Thank you for the advice," he answered coldly. "I said you would swear to anything. I suppose I need say nothing of the way you have deceived me and abused my hospitality for so long. *That* is quite fashionable. But you had better not go far away. Lady Waldermere may want you, and so may I some day," he added in a low angry under-tone.

Wilfred saw that his presence at the moment could do no possible good, so he went down to the stalls, where men were strolling about as an act was just over, and whence he could observe what was going on in the box he had just left.

Could Sir Henry really mean what he said?

Did he mean to actually turn his wife out of doors? It was quite possible. Then what was to be done?

As he waited and watched them, Sir Henry still standing up and speaking from time to time, he tried to guess what was passing and to imagine what was to happen.

This *dénouement*, this scene, he had never dreamed of, never prepared himself for, and now how soon he might be called upon to act for her. The conversation of the men he knew, who were loitering about from one minute to another, was unendurable, and he scarcely knew what he answered to the remarks they made to him. The curtain rose and the next act began; and, at last, he saw Sir Henry leave the box, and as soon as he could get clear of the passage, he hurried to Lady Waldermere's box again, full of anxiety to learn what had passed.

Lady Waldermere's beautiful face was deathly pale; but there was on it a look of calm resolution, which had not been there when he left her.

"Sir Henry swears that I shall never enter his house again," she said in a low voice, which she endeavoured to keep quite calm. "What shall I do?"

"But," said Wilfred, "it is impossible he means to turn you out in the streets, in the middle of the night, and in a ball dress."

"If you knew him as well as I do, you would know that nothing of that kind was impossible to him. He does mean it, and I cannot go home to-night, and the carriage will not come for me."

"Hilda," said Wilfred in a low voice, "can you ever forgive me?"

"It is not the moment to think of anything but what is to be done at this present time," she said. "I cannot stay here. Where am I to go to?"

Wilfred was silent for a minute, and then said, "Will you go to the Digbys? I don't see where else you can go. They must know all, so it can make little difference, to-day or to-morrow; and you must find a friend's home to shelter you."

"I shall soon have no friends," she answered. "But let us go there if you think best. I must now leave all to you."

Lady Waldermere put on her cloak, and they passed down the empty corridors, and called a cab, which they told to go to Eaton Square. They were silent for the first minute or two, and then Lady Waldermere said,

"Strange as it may seem, now the bolt has fallen, it does not seem half so dreadful as I had thought it must be. But Heaven knows what to-morrow may be like. But I feel now that I am more than ever yours, and more than half free from my galling chain."

Wilfred answered by pressing her little hand to his lips, and saying, "If I could only feel sure that the love of my life could make up for the dreadful injury I have brought on you. You know, dear, that if I had only myself to consider, your misfortune is my gain; but I dread the future for you."

"It is no use dreading it now," she answered. "We must meet it as fearlessly as we can. Do you think that I have never foreseen the possibility of this? Do you think that I have never counted the cost since I have given my love to you?"

"You have more courage than I have, dearest," he answered. "The future *shall* be bright at last. But we must settle practically what to do now. I must go in to see Frank and explain to him, and he must tell as much or as little as he likes to his Alice; and then, in the morning, we must take counsel for the future. Thank Heaven! we have one friend on

whom we can depend. I would trust my life and honour to dear old Frank," he said warmly.

"And your wife too?" said Lady Waldermere, to whom the sense of the ridiculous would come in the most serious moments of her life, and who, as she said herself, would laugh if they made some mistake in putting her into her coffin.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Wilfred trying to smile, "as much as any other man. You think, I know, that we are all good for very little; but we are a strange mixture of good and evil, after all."

At last the cab stopped in Eaton Square, and Wilfred got out and rang the bell.

Frank Digby was luckily at home, and was alone with his wife. Wilfred told the man who answered the bell to go and tell him that a friend of his had looked in to see him on very pressing business, but if he could help it not to say his name before Mrs. Digby, as he did not wish to disturb her.

In a minute Frank Digby was with him, and took him into the large dining-room close by.

He saw at once from his face that something very serious had happened, and only said, "What's up this time?"

Wilfred answered, "It's no use making a long story of it now, but the worst has come ! Sir Henry has turned her out of the house, will you take her in ?"

"Whew !" exclaimed Frank. "By Jove, this is serious indeed, but how did it happen ?"

And in two words Wilfred told him how Mrs. Addington had got hold of the letter Lady Waldermere had written to him after her scene with her husband, and had given it to Sir Henry, and then of what had happened at the opera, "and she is now in a cab outside !" he added.

"What a d—d low trick to play," said Frank. "Wait a minute, I must run and speak to Alice."

What he told that lady Wilfred did not know, but he was downstairs in a minute, and said, "Bring her in at once."

Lady Waldermere came in and went upstairs, looking as pale as a ghost, and as soon as she was inside the door, Alice Digby took her in her arms, and said, "My own dearest Hilda, I am so sorry ; but come what may, I will always stand by you !"

Little more was said, as Lady Waldermere said she was so dreadfully tired, and Mrs.

Digby hurried off to get a room ready for her.

Meantime Wilfred and Frank Digby were consulting downstairs, but they could come to no other conclusion than to wait till the morning, and see what the day brought forth ; it was no use now abusing Mrs. Addington, she had done her worst, and far worse it was than they could ever have thought of. The question now was if it was possible to patch up matters in any way so as to avoid a public scandal.

While they were talking Mrs. Digby came in, and coming up to Wilfred, she held out her hand and said, " Mr. St. John, I am so glad that in your trouble you came straight to us. Nothing will ever make me think any evil of dear Hilda. You have been foolish and imprudent, and Sir Henry is hasty ; but all will be explained, and put straight. You had better run upstairs to the back drawing-room and say good night to Hilda now."

Up he went and found her resting in a low chair looking worn and fatigued. He went up to her and took her little hand and said, " Hilda, I am come to say good night. I am so thankful that I can leave you in the hands

of friends for this night; to-morrow we must think of the future; but, dearest, you know now that I am yours for ever, for good days or for evil days !”

“ For good days or for evil,” she answered, “ for ever ! ”

Once more he pressed her hands to his lips and left the room.

He arranged to come early to see Frank and discuss the future, and then slowly turned his steps home.

The whole events of the day were still in such confusion before him that he could feel nothing exactly. There are events so sudden and so startling that the real effect of them cannot be felt at the moment, and from their very weight and suddenness they so stun the sufferer that he feels far less than when some much slighter blow strikes ; and it is only the future which brings home to him the pain of all that has happened.

So it was with both Wilfred St. John and Lady Waldermere, the events of the past day had so overwhelmed them that they both went to bed feeling that some great blow had fallen, but quite unable to realise it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE following morning, after a night of little enough sleep, Wilfred St. John went early to Eaton Square. Frank Digby was already up and waiting for him, and told him that his wife had seen Lady Waldermere, who was well, but it would be hard to say more than that.

“The question is, my dear Frank,” said Wilfred, “what on earth is to be done? You see Sir Henry is such a queer tempered man, I have not the remotest idea what he may do next.”

“I think,” said Frank, “that the first thing to do is to go and get Lady Waldermere some of her things. I do not imagine that the aggrieved baronet meant to confiscate them! and I must harden my heart and see him, and tell him where she is.”

“What is to be done if he is obdurate?” said Wilfred. “You see I could never dream of our friendship bringing all this about.”

“Well,” answered Digby, “I don’t fancy that people do generally foresee the consequences of their flirtations till they come. I know that it is all very well to joke about other people’s misfortunes; but when such a crash as this comes to ourselves, we never imagined it could be such an overwhelming one. But it is no use moralising over it or lecturing you now. I can reserve that treat, and I won’t take the base advantage of preaching to you now you are down. I am most sorry for you both, but, you see, I never dreamt that things had gone so far.”

“Gone so far! My dear Frank,” said Wilfred rather hastily, “I don’t quite know what you mean!”

“Come, my dear old man,” he answered, “I mean nothing except that they have come to a pretty pass. You know I don’t mean to say anything to hurt you, man, but you may as well walk with me part of the way; you can do no good here, and no one is about yet.”

So the two friends started from Park Lane, but their conversation was not very animated.

Wilfred was at his wits' end to know what to do next, and Digby was turning over the situation in his mind, and wondering if things were too bad to be patched up, and a public scandal avoided. Wilfred was so touchy that it was most difficult to get much out of him, and he felt that he must approach Sir Henry rather in the dark. If anything which really affected his honour had come out, he felt that Sir Henry was sure to be inexorable, and what would then become of Lady 'Waldermere' he could not look forward to, so he left Wilfred at Hyde Park Corner, feeling anything but reassured about the business he had taken in hand.

Wilfred went into the Park and threw himself down on a bench in sight of the house he knew so well, and from which he could see the shady conservatory with its masses of flowers, which he had known so well in happier hours, and there he waited impatiently the result of Digby's mission.

That gentleman, though he never had wanted for modest assurance in his life, had more of the feeling with which he had approached the fatal block in his schoolboy days, than he had experienced ever since, for he felt that come

what might his interview must be painful, and very likely fruitless. He rang at the bell, which was answered after a time by a footman, who was not at all in the smart array of the Waldermore retinue, and who looked as though something had turned the house upside down.

As soon as he saw him he said, "Oh! Mr. Digby, I am so glad you are come. Mr. Miles will be so glad to see you; we don't know what to do."

"Then, please send Miles to me; but I want to see Sir Henry," answered Digby.

"The doctor is with him still," answered the footman, "but perhaps you will wish to see him and hear what he says."

"The doctor!" exclaimed Frank. "What does the doctor want with him; he is not ill, I trust?"

"I fear very ill, sir," answered the man; and then, anxious to be the first to tell him the news, he went on, "You see, sir, Sir Henry came home last night, and before he had been a few minutes in the house, he rang the bell for a cab and went off. We heard him say, 'To the Opera!' and then, in about an hour, he came back again, and said that her ladyship

would not want the carriage, as she was gone to stay at a friend's house, so her maid was not to sit up for her. We noticed that Sir Henry seemed very strange and excited, but we knew nothing to cause it, and when Mr. Miles went to bed he was still in the library. But this morning, when the housemaids went in there, he was seated in the big arm-chair for all the world like one dead. Mr. Miles went to him at once, and I went off to the doctor, and by the time he came they had him to bed. He is very bad, sir, and does not seem the least sensible, and we don't know what to do."

"Well, please to let me see Miles and Lady Waldermere's maid as soon as I can."

The stately gentleman who presided over Sir Henry's household came directly, as much disturbed as it was possible for one so long trained to impassibility to be, and he could only repeat what Digby had already learnt, but he told the maid to put a few necessary things together and take them to his house, where she would find Lady Waldermere; and he told her that if she asked about Sir Henry she had better only say that she had heard he was unwell. Nothing more till he returned.

After waiting some little time the doctor came to him. He was the same agreeable man who lived so close by, and who had come to visit Wilfred when laid up in that same house not a year before.

He knew Digby as an intimate friend of the family, and as soon as he saw him he looked very serious and shook his head.

"What is it?" asked Digby.

"Paralysis," he answered; "it is a very severe attack, and how far he may rally it is impossible to say. But the extraordinary absence of Lady Waldermere, and none of the servants knowing where she is, makes things if possible worse."

"She is only at my house, where she was very late, and stayed to sleep," he replied, "and I have sent her maid to her now, so she will be here very soon. But tell me, is he unconscious? Does he know no one?"

"No one," he answered; "and I fear never will again. Men do occasionally return in an extraordinary way, but this is a very bad case, and I cannot feel much hope. It will be dreadful news to take to Lady Waldermere. I have done all I can and we shall do our utmost, but, honestly, I can give

but little hope. It is a strange case, and he was not in the least a man I should ever have foreseen it in. His life, too, was so tranquil and undisturbed."

It was impossible for Digby to think over it all without a strange mixture of thoughts coming to him. He had known Sir Henry long, and latterly very well, but an intimate friend of his he never was, yet he could not help being much shocked at the account of him. At the same time it would come across him that here was a very short cut out of their difficulties; but what an alternative for Lady Waldermere! He dreaded the having to take the news to her, and he felt he must do it himself. But his next thought was, what had become of the letter, and he felt that he must try, at any cost, to get hold of it, as he could not tell who might not read it if it were to be put away among Sir Henry's things; so he called Mr. Miles and asked him whether, as he was there, and an intimate friend of the family—before Lady Waldermere came,—he would like him to help him lock up Sir Henry's papers, etc.

Mr. Miles said he should be much obliged if he would, and would take the keys to her; so

they set to work at once, while the doctor returned to Sir Henry's room. Among the first things he saw on the table was a letter in the poorly-disguised writing of Mrs. Addington, which had been in the pocket of the coat in which Sir Henry was found. Digby could not attempt to take it in the presence of Miles, but he had the satisfaction of turning the key of a drawer which enclosed it and of pocketing the key. He then saw the nurse and the two little girls and told them that Lady Waldermere would come to them very soon, and jumping into a Hansom went back to Eaton Square.

Wilfred St. John saw him going in the distance, but could not stop him, and had to follow as quickly as he could, still impatient and anxious.

When he reached his house he found that Lady Waldermere's maid had preceded him by some time, and that her mistress was nearly ready to see him. He made up his mind that he would be the best person to tell her, so as gently as he could he told her the shocking news.

Lady Waldermere was not a woman to make a scene about anything. She only turned

deathly pale, and for a moment he thought she would have fainted. But when he said that she had better go back to her house, it was then that the struggle in her mind arose.

There seemed to her to be something dreadful in taking advantage of his sudden illness. But what else could she do? Only the two Digbys and Wilfred knew anything of what had passed, and it was impossible for her to be absent without exciting every sort of remark. But she now dreaded seeing the insensible face of her husband more than she would ever have dreaded meeting him in health and strength.

Digby saw her hesitation, and he said, "I told your children that you would be with them by the time they had had breakfast, so, as soon as you have had something, I hope you will let us take you. I have got the keys of Sir Henry's drawers, and you will find his letters in his writing-table. I put them there myself." He then added, "No one but Wilfred and I know anything about what has happened, and no one ever will. I shall not even tell my wife more than she knows."

Lady Waldermere did not attempt to answer him, she only held out her hand to him,

and said, in a low voice, "I can never forget your kindness."

At this moment, Wilfred, who had had to walk down, came in, and was struck with horror at the pale, frightened-looking faces of both Frank Digby and Lady Waldermere; but, before he could speak, Frank beckoned him out of the room and told him what had happened.

Very much shocked he was; but what his exact feelings were it would have been very difficult to describe. Such startling events were succeeding one another so rapidly that he could feel no more surprise, and he could not help the feeling coming over him that, by this strange accident, Lady Waldermere would be saved.

Mrs. Digby was full of sympathy, and wanted to go with her friend to Park Lane, but she asked her to come later; and Frank Digby took her there at once, as she would not think of breakfast; she just spoke to Wilfred, and told him she would see him later in the day if he called and asked for her, and then she started for her trying meeting.

When she got to the house, she found her dear old friend the doctor there, and it

was the greatest consolation to her to see him.

He told her in a few words, and as quietly as he possibly could, what her husband's state was, and he assured her that it was perfectly certain that he could not know her. How little could he think that it was the only consolation for the minute to her, as without that certainty she could never have faced him.

At last, she felt that she must go into his room; but the trial of seeing him was far greater than she had ever anticipated.

She had never really loved him, it was true; but she had lived with him so many years, and they had had so much in common to bind them together. He was the father of her children, and of her darling little Hilda; and when she went up to his bedside and saw him lying helplessly there, little more than an animated corpse, her feelings perfectly overcame her. She forgot all the scene of the night before, she forgot all her past life, and all the long trial it had been to her to try to do her duty as a wife, and all the woman in her burst out. She threw herself on her knees by the bed and hid her face, and for a few minutes remained there perfectly motionless; at last, she

rose and slowly left the room. But then the voices of her two little girls, hushed so as to be almost inaudible, because papa was ill, roused her, and, in another moment, she had them both in her arms. Here, at least, was something to live for, and, come what might, a strange feeling came over her of almost thankfulness that they could never know of the terrible scene at the opera of the night before. And, strengthened and revived by the feeling that she had them to live for and to care for, she set about the affairs of the house and the many arrangements necessary.

The day wore away without any change in Sir Henry. Whatever medical skill and care could do for him was done, but to no purpose; and there seemed little chance that he would recover any of his strength and power of moving, while his sense of thought seemed to be hopelessly dead.

Wilfred called in the afternoon and saw Lady Waldermere for a short time, but she would not let him stay; and to both of them, after all which had passed, there seemed something shocking in taking a sort of advantage of the state of Sir Henry upstairs to meet again under his roof.

Gradually the day passed away and the next day succeeded, and still no change in the state of Sir Henry. The Digbys were unremitting in their kind attentions to Lady Waldermere. Mrs. Digby took the children out driving, and did all she could to distract the mind of her unhappy friend.

A week passed by and Sir Henry recovered his strength a little, but his power of mind seemed to be hopelessly gone; and though the doctors thought his life was in no immediate danger, yet they feared his mind was gone for ever.

The future prospect seemed indeed a sad one. Lady Waldermere, tied hopelessly to her poor half-dead husband, with an undefined feeling of remorse ever clinging to her, and a half dread that he might some day recover his mind and renew the half-completed breach in the household.

She dared not see much of Wilfred. She could not leave the house, and she could not make up her mind to let him come there for longer than the time to ask how he was and to say a few words of comfort to her.

Charley Addington had come to call and ask after Sir Henry several times, and had

regretted so that his wife was too unwell to leave the house or she would have come herself to see her.

That lady really was unwell ; violent as had been her resentment for the moment against Lady Waldermere, the consequences of her doings now were a great shock to her. She could at the moment have looked with little enough feeling on the misery and disgrace of her rival, but the result of her sudden impulse, to send the letter to Sir Henry, filled her with horror, and she saw what a terrible — what a dishonourable thing she had done, and she felt that it must be known to two people who had been her greatest friends, but who must carry her secret to their dying day. When she heard Charley's account of the sad sight Sir Henry was, and the desolate household in Park Lane, she, whose bad impulses, like all her qualities, were only on the surface, would have given worlds to undo what she had done, and to have gone to be of help. Mrs. Digby came to see her and talked over it all by the hour ; how curious it was that Lady Waldermere should have come and stayed at her house that night ! and how dreadfully depressed she was ! and of all she

said and did, and of Wilfred's sympathy and kindness, and how Frank was like an angel. The said angel did not come to see her, and she felt that he must know what she had done, and that gradually he would make his wife drop her little by little.

The state of mind she was in, in real truth, did make her unwell, and she felt that if she went out, it would be impossible to make any excuse for not calling in Park Lane, which she could not possibly do. At times she tried to lash up again her anger against the unfortunate pair, but all the past now seemed so little compared to the stern reality of the present. Unscrupulous in little things in her past life, she might have been more than once, but a great crime, like taking the letter and sending it to Sir Henry, she had never dreamed of committing, and at times now it was impossible to realise that she ever could have done it, but the hard present, with all its suffering, reminded her only too much of it all, and at last she told Charley she could stay no longer, and went down to Kirthorpe.

The days rolled on, and the doctors told Lady Waldermere that she had better take Sir

Henry down to Waldermere, as he would be better there than in London ; that all they could do for him had been done ; and that, unless there was some extraordinary change in his state, his servant and nurse, and the doctor in the country could do all that was possible.

It was impossible for her to look forward to her life at Waldermere Park without dread. Most lonely and dismal it must be. She must be tied perpetually to her husband without the power of doing him any good, and she must wait by his side for an end which could only be sad, though it would set her free, but of that she dared not think. He might yet live for years, his recovery in any way she could not hope for or dread, but she felt that her duty was at his side, and though she felt that duty so hard in good days, now that the evil ones had come she never dreamed of shrinking from it. But she knew how everything at Waldermere would remind her of Wilfred, and it was impossible for him to come there. It would seem too much like a mockery of the poor invalid for him to come and stay, whoever might be in the house, and she could not but feel that she was now separated from him more than ever.

Wilfred was still in London, and the Digbys would not go while they felt they could be of 'use to Lady Waldermere, though the month of August had come and London was deserted.

Lady Waldermere and Wilfred met every day, and dined continually with the Digbys, without whose friendship and help they would both have been lost, but the time came at last when Sir Henry must be moved, and they must part. The day before Lady Waldermere was going, they were sitting in the drawing-room of the Digbys' house, where their friends had left them together after luncheon, and were talking over the future and what it would be to them.

"How strange it seems," she said to him, "that we should be separated even more now than when we had to think so much about what we did, and what we wrote. But, Wilfred, there is one thing which will console me more than anything else in your absence, and that will be to think that you will be once more taking your part in life. Life does indeed look serious to us now; we have been through a dreadful crisis, but the escape from it has been in many ways quite as dreadful. The whole

of the results of those two days were so sudden, so overwhelming, that I could not understand them; now I do,—at least better. I see now we were on the edge of an abyss, and nothing but the other sad event could have saved us from it. You know so well what my life was for so many years that I need say nothing to you of it, but that this should be the end of it, that my freedom should come to me with another chain more impossible to break, is so strange.”

“It is indeed strange,” he answered; “and it is one I cannot help you to bear, that is the hardest part of it; but, dear Hilda, now that I look back on the escape which you had, I cannot but see the more what it was from, and what I might have been the cause of bringing on you. It may indeed, as you told me, be often far better to bear the ills we have than fly to those we know not of! But the strangest thing of all was the way we were almost driven to fly. I have often tried to realize what would have happened, but I cannot.”

“I try not to think of it,” she answered; “the strange mixture of thoughts which come before me make it impossible to think of it, but, Wilfred, the long future will be very long,

and very dreary ! My courage often fails when I think of the months and years before me ! ”

“ But, dear,” he said, “ I shall never be far from you ; and if I may not stay at Waldermere, I can always write, and we can meet from time to time.”

So they talked on through the afternoon till they must part ; and though each tried to give the other mutual assurances of hope and trust, it was with sad hearts they said farewell, and cold and cheerless seemed the world when they had separated.

CHAPTER XII.

THE Waldermere family had gone down into the country, and the Digbys had gone with them to try to make things more cheerful for a little, but Wilfred still lingered on in London.

He was indeed at last looking at life seriously and earnestly, and he was trying hard to be once more playing his part in it.

At last an opportunity presented itself to him when he least expected it. He had many acquaintances and some friends, and he had impressed on all how very anxious he was to be once more in harness.

He received a message one day from one of his friends, telling him he was very anxious to see him as soon as possible on important business; and when he met him, he told him that there was an opportunity of his going out as

an agent for some very important business to a foreign Government ; that complications had arisen about it, and a man of trust and ability was wanted to go immediately; and that he had proposed him to go. Would he go? He could not say how long it might take, but it was an arduous undertaking and one full of serious responsibility, though possibly of great success in the end.

Wilfred inquired further into it, and found that, though a difficult and complicated work, it was one which he felt sure he could undertake, so he asked two days to think over it, but he could almost promise to go. If he did so, he was to start immediately.

He wrote at once to Lady Waldermere, telling her exactly what had been proposed, and asking her advice, as she was to him his guiding star in life, and he should do nothing without her dear advice and concurrence.

She wrote back to him at once, telling him how much and deeply she should feel his leaving England, but that clearly the path of duty now for him lay elsewhere, and she felt he must go. But she must see him before he left.

Wilfred set to work to prepare for his imme-

diat departure, and wrote entreating Lady Waldermere to let him come down to see her, if only for a few hours. He went down for a night to his sister's in Kent, and on his return he found a letter telling him he might come down to Waldermere, but only for the day. She told him that Sir Henry was quite unchanged, but that she herself was suffering from a most unusual and miserable state of depression, that she could not come to London, but that she could not bear to let him go without seeing him once more.

At length the day came when Wilfred was to see the last of all he loved, and start on his long journey. He went down by an early train, and drove through the well-known beautiful chestnuts and elms of the old park.

The day was most glorious, in all the splendour of late summer and early autumn. Nothing seemed changed; the old park and the old house seemed to mock at the changes of the lords and masters who might rule over them for their little hour; and as he drove up to the house the deer were feeding in the woody glades, and the peacocks sunning themselves as though there was no suffering and no sadness in that grey old pile of building.

He was welcomed in the hall by little Hilda and her familiar spirit just as of old, and she told him that Flossy and Harry were out riding, but that she had stayed in to meet him, and mamma would be there directly.

Soon Lady Waldermere came in, looking pale and worn; she greeted him with a look of bright pleasure in her eyes, but it seemed only a transitory gleam which soon died out, and then he saw how ill and tired she looked. She told him the Digbys were still with her and had been so kind and good, and that there was no change whatever in Sir Henry. In health he was a little stronger, but there was no return whatever of his mind. She said that they would have luncheon directly, and that after luncheon she would go out with him, as that would be the best chance of their being able to have a long and uninterrupted talk.

The Digbys were most warm in their welcome to him, and he found time for a few words alone with Frank. He asked him all he could about Lady Waldermere, and he told him that she had never alluded in any way to the past scenes, so he could say nothing whatever about her state of mind, but it was quite evident that she suffered terribly from depression,

though he hoped that that would soon pass away. He said that he really believed that his absence from England would be a good thing, and he trusted that Lady Waldermere would be able to come to a calmer frame of mind. He told him that he and his wife would stay there a little longer, but that at present she would not have any one else there. Her mother was still in Italy and she would not allow her to be called to England, but he hoped that he and his wife might be able to persuade her to send for her a little later. As to Sir Henry's state, he said that the doctors said he might have another attack, but that if he did not he might continue in his present state for years.

Luncheon passed over, and seemed to him like the ghost of the days gone by; the children were as bright as ever, and their mother made every effort to let none of her sadness cloud the sunshine of their lives, but to him it was all most sad.

As soon as they left the dining-room Lady Waldermere said to him,

“Now, if you like, I will go out for a little with you. I must get a little fresh air.”

In a few minutes she joined him, with a

bright shawl on her light dress, and he thought that her slight graceful figure looked even slighter and more girlish than in bygone days, in spite of the look of care and deep sorrow in her eyes.

"Let us go," she said, "to our old seat looking over the lake. I love to go there and think, and I want to go there with you for the last time."

Some of the same hinds were feeding not far from the clump of trees, and the same fawns, only larger grown, were playing round the spot to which the thoughts of both of them had turned so often. The brackens, then so green and soft, had now grown tall, and were putting on the russet hue of autumn, but the fair scene round them was all unchanged.

Little was said by either of them as they walked there; Lady Waldermere seemed tired and wearied, and to be longing for rest. At last they reached the well-remembered spot, and both stood still while he looked sadly and lovingly into her dear face now so pale and worn. Both were silent for a minute, —the next the calm self-possessed Hilda Waldermere was in his arms, her face hidden on his shoulder; sobbing passionately.

In vain he tried to stay her tears, and to make her speak ; for many minutes she could not utter one word. At last she raised her tearful eyes to his and said in a broken voice,

“ Oh ! Wilfred, I was forced to see you again once more. And this is the end of all my boasted strength and self-control ; I never knew till now I am to lose you how much I loved you ! ”

What could he say to comfort her ? while his own heart was torn by every passion and emotion. And all his self-control had fled before her misery and grief. Wild words he spoke, of love and of hope in the distant future,—he scarcely knew what,—all he was conscious of was that he was there for so brief a time with her in his arms, for whom he would have willingly died—that he could do nothing to help her in her sorrow—and that he must so soon leave her, for how long he knew not.

At last she became calmer, and he made her a soft bed in the deep thick brackens and moss, and then he sat down by her side.

She told him of all the anxious nights and days she had passed, and how all her strength and courage seemed to be leaving her, and she longed to have him there to cling to. Never

in her past life had she imagined how delightful it would be to have one she loved so entirely close to her in her sorrow, and now, she who had always strengthened and encouraged him, was asking of him help and strength in her trials.

"Oh! Wilfred," she said, "if it is indeed so wrong, as some people tell us, for a woman tied to a man she cannot love, to pour out all the pent-up love of her life upon another, I am indeed punished. My present trials seem too great for me. I try not to show it, but you do not know what I feel when I see the senseless eyes of my husband looking at me. I would sooner bear the scorn and contempt of all the world than their silent reproach; at times it is more than I can bear. And I cannot bear to feel that but for me he might be now well and strong. We women are strange creatures, but I am more near loving him than I have been all these years I have been his wife. I often forget all the struggles I have had during these long years to do my duty, and I only see the result of my so far forgetting it as to love you so dearly. Don't think, dear," she went on, gently laying her hand on his, "that I am for one moment reproaching you; but I must tell you all I think

and feel for the last time. For the last time," she said slowly to him, in a voice struggling with her grief. "Oh! Wilfred, you don't know how I long to say to you, 'Take me with you.' Let me share all the fortunes of your life. Hide all my sorrows and troubles in your dear loving heart, and never, never leave you again. Oh! how can I bear the future?"

"Oh! Hilda, my own, own love," he said, scarcely able to control himself, "it seems such a mockery in me to talk of patience and courage to you—to you who have taught me what patience and courage were. I know how much harder the trial is to those who stay at home and bear, than to those who go and have all the excitement and distraction of work and action. It seems so cruel, so dreadful to leave you, you poor darling, in the midst of your trouble. It is, Hilda, for me now to say to you, have faith and trust in the future. I have, my own love, such a faith now, such a trust in that future that I can say to you, have this trust too. You, I know, believe no more than I do, that because the chances of the world have so bound your body that you must submit to its chains—that because we never met in the days when you

were free, when we could have united ourselves here, once and for ever, we must be separated for ever. No! our hearts, our spirits are so indissolubly united, that 'come weal or woe, through happiness or misery, they can never be parted asunder,—and here, or it may be, Hilda, hereafter, we shall be united, and in a union of eternal happiness we shall be more than fully compensated for our days of wretchedness now. Do you think that I would not give all it was possible for a man to give to be united to you now? How light and easy would the task I have before me be with you at my side. But it may not be. We must each strive to bear our burden, and to come purified out of the fire of suffering and sorrow in the happy future in which I, Hilda, have faith, and in which I know that you have.”

He was sitting on the ground, and leaning against a great tree behind him, and she was lying on the bed which he had made for her, with her head resting against his shoulder, and both her little hands in his. She was silent for some moments after he had spoken; and then she said, “I know you are right; I don't know where my courage has gone. I think that my long watching and anxiety have made

me so feeble. I could never have believed that I could dread the future so, but such an indefinable dread has at times come over me. I shall be better now I have seen you; if you had left England without my seeing you, Wilfred, I believe I should have died. Oh! how hardly I have thought and judged in my past life of those poor creatures who have loved like us so deeply and so vainly. How truly the heart alone knows its own bitterness. How cruelly do we judge of those of whose trials and sufferings we know nothing. In my arrogance, in my self-sufficiency, how often I have smiled at those whose uncontrollable feelings have driven them into what the world calls folly and sin, but into what to them is the only refuge from their misery. Wilfred, I will be brave; I will face the dim and shadowy future. For you, for your sake, for our future love and happiness, I will bear whatever trials may be in store. We shall meet again, and the day will come when these miserable chains that bind me now will have faded into thin air, and we shall never part, never, never part. Oh! my own love," she murmured, as she clung to him with her arms round his neck, and again sobbed with the

emotion which she struggled in vain to restrain.

All too quickly passed the short time which they could be together, and when at last they must go, slowly and sadly they returned to the house, to part for how long they knew not.

The Digbys were kindness itself. Mrs. Digby somehow felt and allowed the existence of the ~~v~~ery dear friendship between her friends, and she told Wilfred how she should do everything in her power to help her through her trials. Little more could he say or do, and at length he had to tear himself away, and little Hilda could scarcely understand the silent sadness with which he gave her a last kiss, as he left her standing on the old stone steps under the calm impassive griffins who had witnessed so many partings and so many greetings at the door of the old hall.

Waldermere Park and the loved ones which it held was soon left far behind, and in three days more Wilfred had started for the distant scene of his labours.

CHAPTER XIII.

WILFRED found that what he had undertaken was even a longer and more laborious task than he had expected. At times he had hard and anxious work; but there were long and wearying delays when the time hung very heavily on him, and when his thoughts turned perpetually to England. After he had settled down to his work and found how long he must remain where he was, and how many unoccupied hours he must have upon his hands, he thought of his conversation with Lady Waldermere on that delightful evening on the river, the last they ever passed together, and he determined to do what she had suggested to him, and to write something of what he had seen and learned in the world of London. It would occupy his mind and his time; it would bring before him again some of those

scenes in the remembrance of which it was now his sole delight to live ; and when he, at last, should return to England, when he was once more near in body, as well as in spirit, to the guardian angel of his life, she would learn from those pages how perpetually she had lived in his thoughts and how entirely she had influenced and changed his life.

Every mail brought a letter from her. But deep as was the feeling of delight which he felt in reading them, it was with a feeling of pain that he could trace in those letters the change from all her old brightness. Not that she did not make every effort to try to paint her life in the brightest way it was possible, and she would talk of the children, of dear little Hilda, and of all she heard was going on in that world from which she was so entirely cut off ; but in the more serious parts of them, in which she alluded to herself and to him, the feeling of depression and constant unhappiness was all too plain.

At last, she spoke despondingly of her health, and then her letters ceased altogether.

Wilfred felt as though the painful anxiety which he suffered would drive him mad. She

was ill and he could not go to her, could not even hear of her. He could still write to her, but he could never know if she was well enough to read those letters in which he poured out his whole heart to her.

The Digbys, who had been with her so long, had left England for the south of Europe before Lady Waldermere was ill, so that he had no one to hear of her from; and he felt at times as though he must give up all he was doing and fly to England to hear of her.

Never in his past life had he imagined what mental suffering might be. Through the long sleepless hours of the night, his mind, his spirit, was ever with hers; and often, in the darkness or by the dim light of the moon pouring into his room, he would strain his nerves and his senses to catch some more distinct evidence of her presence, and when she seemed more near to him than usual he would long to know more certainly if he, too, at those moments, seemed equally near to her. Even in his most depressed and anxious hours he felt a certainty that she still lived; felt, he knew not why or how, but still he felt a perfect certainty that if it left her lovely body, her sweet spirit would visit him and would comfort him

ere it departed to that place of rest to wait till his weary one should be united to it. It was this conviction, this feeling of perfect certainty that enabled him to bear the long weeks of painful suspense that he had to live through, and the restless nights which he passed after the work of the day, the hours of which were almost a relief to him, while his unoccupied time he employed in writing and in retracing in his memory so many of those happy scenes of the past.

At last, the mail brought him a letter from her, written from Bournemouth. She told him that she had been very ill, and that the doctors had been very anxious about her; but that now she was better, and they had sent her to the sea. She told him how she had clung to Waldermere, where everything reminded her so of him; but that then she was suffering from illness and from every kind of wretchedness and depression; but that now it was all past, that she had lived through that misery, and would be strong and well again by the time he returned; that his letters, when she could once again read them, had been her only comfort, telling her that he was well and prospering, and hopeful of perfect success in

his undertaking. Sir Henry was in exactly the same state as when he left. She had been obliged to leave him at Waldermere, but the dear children were with her, and she trusted the time would come when they would at last see each other again, and he would return to England to begin his real life there. She spoke with the deepest interest of the book he was writing, which she longed to see, and to trace in it some reflection of what his thoughts had been through those long weary months.

What a happiness this letter was to Wilfred! What a relief from anxious suspense! He felt once more that there could be happiness even in this troublesome world. A heavy weight had been lifted from his heart. He was passing out of the cloud, and the sun was once more piercing the dark shade which had shrouded his life for so many months. His task, now drawing to a close, seemed perfectly light and easy, and all the world was suddenly brightened to him. Difficulties which had long detained him, and which he had almost despaired of seeing his way out of, now vanished, and he saw clearly before him a most triumphant conclusion to the labours of so many months. He was able

to write back a most cheerful letter to Lady Waldermere, and tell her that he hoped in six weeks, or two months at the farthest, to leave for England, and to have accomplished his difficult undertaking with a success beyond his most sanguine hopes.

Charley Addington wrote to him once a very characteristic letter with some facetious remarks upon the Llewellyn baby and the Digby *ménage*, and he said too, "There seems to be, as far as I can make out, a split between my wife and Lady Waldermere. It is a great bore, as I like her very much, and I believe it would have done her a world of good to come to us in Scotland. She has been very bad and, as far as I can learn, has had rather a near shave of it. But she is better now, and they say will get quite strong again. Upon my life, I believe that you were at the bottom of all the trouble. You men who follow the career which you used to, never seem to think that there can be any consequences; but let us hope that you intend now to be a useful and respectable member of society, only I wish you were married. What a fool you were to let Frank Digby carry off the widow when she was there ready to your hand!"

With this sort of good advice, interspersed with anecdotes of the most lively, not to say startling, description, was Charley's letter filled, and he wound it up by saying that, as he had been so long away, he trusted that if he was the cause of the feud between the two ladies, his absence would enable them to make friends again, as their little society had been much too pleasant to be broken up.

At last his work was done, and Wilfred could once more return to England. Often, on his homeward journey, he contrasted this return with what his feelings had been on more than one homeward voyage in bygone years. Then he was coming back after working and struggling through many difficulties, but all in vain, with a bitter sense of failure and disappointment at his heart. Then he had only looked upon England as a place where he was to endeavour to forget his past labours and vexations; when, disgusted with what was more serious and more noble, he was to strive to forget in the pleasures and dissipations of London, the higher and greater aims and aspirations of life, the effort to realise which had only brought disappointment and weariness. Then, though he felt a sincere pleasure at once

more seeing his brothers and sisters, he had a sense that the world got on very well without him, that his vacant place was filled before the vessel which bore him away had lost sight of the shore, and that there was no heart in which he lived, no loving spirit with whom he was ever present. Now, how changed was all that ! He had worked as he had never worked in his life before, and he had succeeded. He had established his name as that of an able and a useful man ; he had made for himself a place in the world and asserted his claim to its consideration and respect, and had, he trusted, paved the way to a successful career in the future. And, above all, the world was indeed changed to him in its sweetest and most precious aspect. He knew that there was one loving heart in which he lived constantly through all the long months of his exile, that there was one sweet being who would indeed rejoice in his success, would feel true gratification and triumph at the share she had had in it, and to whom he trusted that his return might bring happiness, and with that, health and strength.

England was in the full beauty of summer when he landed, and the train bore him

through the lovely green fields to London. He had left the land of his labours, rather sooner than he had expected at the last moment, so that he had not written to any one to say when to expect him, and, consequently, he had more than two months' news to pick up on his arrival.

After reporting himself to his head-quarters, he turned his steps at once to Park Lane; whatever the news he was to learn of Lady Waldermere might be, he preferred hearing it at once there to going through the trial of hearing it from the lips of some friend. But it was with a fast-beating anxious heart that he rang at the bell of that well-known house. The servant who opened the door was dressed in deep mourning, and he felt that it required all his courage to ask for Lady Waldermere, and for one moment a feeling of dreadful fear and suspense almost overcame him. With a great effort he pulled himself together and asked for her, and the man said, "Her ladyship is in town, sir, but she sees no one; however, I will tell her you are here if you like," for he knew how intimate Wilfred had been in the house in days gone by.

While he was gone Wilfred tried to realise

what this deep mourning meant; could it be that Sir Henry had gone to rest, or had Lady Waldermere lost one of the dear little children. But, oh! not his sweet little Hilda! He still felt himself utterly unnerved by the feeling of horror and fear which the black livery of the footman had caused him, when he came back to say that Lady Waldermere was in the library and would like to see him.

Another moment and he was with her, and held her tiny hand once more in his. He saw her deep mourning and there was no need to ask questions, but she saw from his face at once that he had not heard of it before; in answer to his inquiring look at her widow's cap, she said in a low voice,

"Yes! it is even so,—just one month ago, and I am here settling everything."

He bent low over her little hand and kissed it, and for some moments could not say one word; at last he led her to a chair, and said,

"And you, dear Hilda, tell me how you are? Oh! I have been so anxious about you!"

"Am I so very much changed, Wilfred dear?" she answered. "Do I look so very old and worn?"

"You, my own dear love!" he answered; "you look all unchanged to me. To me you are ever your own sweet self. I should never see any change in you if I were to lose you for fifty years; you would still be your own dear self. But I see no change whatever in you, dear; but you, 'poor dear thing, I fear you were very ill! Oh, Hilda! you do not know how anxious about you I was; how I longed to be with you!"

"Yes, dear," she answered; "I do know. Are you surprised at my saying that I do know?" she said in a low voice, leaning a little towards him, and looking earnestly at him.

"No," he replied. "No, my own Hilda; I am not. You know the intense belief, the perfect faith which we both have in our power of being together, though far apart in body. You were so continually with me through all my trouble and anxiety that I could not doubt that my troubled and weary spirit was at times with you. Do you know, dear, that all through your illness, all through those dreadful weeks of anxiety and dread, I felt a certainty that you were still alive, that I might still hope to see you again in this world.

I know, how I cannot tell you, but still I know beyond any power of doubting, that your loved spirit, if it quitted your sweet body, would at least visit me ere it departed to its place of rest, even if it would not then be always more and more distinctly near me. To no one but you could I talk like this. To the world what I am saying would be idle words, and would only raise a smile as at the expression of strange and curious fancies, but to us this is no fancy; those alone can know, those few whose lives are so closely and so inseparably united, alone can tell what that feeling is of perpetual sympathy, perpetual communion. To such there is no possibility of the doubts of materialists as to the existence of an invisible and an immaterial spirit. And if I believed in this before I left England and left you, it has become to me, while far away, a thing of certainty—a part of my life.”

“You cannot feel it, Wilfred,” she answered, “more than I do. I have often thought how almost all the men and women I know, if not all, would amuse themselves at my fancies if I were to attempt to speak of the possibilities of such a belief in the power of our spirits, of the existence of such an inner, such a spiritual

life. Not that contemplative and imaginary spiritual life which mystics so often write and preach about, but of a real life in which we can communicate with those nearest and dearest to us,—a life which is the perfection of love, of truth, and of happiness. It seems a subject too sacred and too mysterious to put into words, even to you,—to you whose life is so wrapt up in mine,—but we are both so conscious of it, and live so firmly in the conviction of its truth that words are unnecessary, only that the words which now pass between us seem to be the proofs that we are once more united in bodily form, as we have been so long in that which is spiritual.”

“Yes, my own darling,” he answered, “and the happiness is almost too great. Do you remember your words to me the last time we were together on the river, that soft delightful evening when we talked over past and future, and forgot everything in the world but ourselves? When you told me to be patient, to be strong and hopeful, and to remember as my motto, *Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre*? Courage and hope, these you have taught me; trials we have had, trials again we shall have, but nothing in life or in death can divide us.

To the decrees of fate we have had to submit, but I knew that the time would come, if not here, in some other more perfected state, when we shall be united never to part."

They were both silent for some moments, —he held both her little hands in his, and was looking intently into her large wistful eyes, in which were so plainly written all the sufferings and trials of the past years. Paler and thinner she was than when they parted, but her beauty had about it something more spiritual, more ideal than ever before. Time which shakes the love and constancy of so many, had but added strength to theirs. Separation had only proved to them how perfectly a part of each other's lives they were, and how indissoluble was the union between them.

Once more they were there together, in that well-known room which had been the scene of so many bygone meetings. Where Wilfréd had first learnt to know Hilda Waldermere in those happy days when she nursed him so tenderly, and where in later days he had come to her in such sorrow and misery.

Gradually she told him of all that had passed while he had been away, of the un-

changed state of Sir Henry for so many months, and of her illness. She told him how anxious the doctors were about her, but that she herself would not die without seeing him once again. How sad she was not to be able to write to him, that the Digbys had gone abroad at a time when she was much better, and she would not have them recalled, so that she had no one to write to him. That Sir Henry had died a month back, at Waldermere, and that up to the last week there had been no change in him, and that he never recovered his mind at all. That was why she was up in London, arranging everything, as she was left sole guardian to her children. "And now, Wilfred," she said, "that my freedom has come to me, it almost makes me sad. You know, you alone know, what my married life has been, and that I cannot pretend to mourn deeply for a husband I never could love, but still we lived together so many years, we had so many interests, so much in common, that I feel sadder than I could ever have believed; and then, the dreadful past year, when his presence has seemed like a perpetual reproach to me. Oh! if it has been so wrong to love you so dearly, I have indeed been

punished. But now you are indeed with me once more, and I seem to live again, but to live a new life, a calmer, quieter life than in days goneby, may it only be a happier one. Whatever the future is, at least we have been tried in the fire of suffering and sorrow. We do truly know each other and ourselves."

While they were talking the door opened, and little Hilda appeared. She stood for one minute looking in astonishment at Wilfred, and the next was in his arms, kissing him with intense delight, while the faithful Brebis jumped all over them, and barked in frantic joy at finding her old friend again.

The whole thing seemed like a dream to Wilfred, a sweet dream of future happiness. The whole of the world outside seemed to fade into nothingness; all his world was now in that room, and there was nothing to separate him from it.

The days passed quickly by. Lady Waldermere was living so quietly that he was able to see her continually, while he was finishing off his already almost completed task. Soon that was done, and Lady Waldermere was free from lawyers and agents, and had settled to go abroad, and in the most quiet and beautiful

places in Europe to enjoy the society which was dearest to her in the world.

In their happiness at being together once more, Hilda and Wilfred had almost agreed to partially forgive Mrs. Addington, so much so as to be able to meet her again some day.

Sir Percy Fitzroy had been away when Sir Henry died, but he had called in Park Lane as soon as he could, and seemed quite disposed to return to his allegiance once more, but the sudden departure of Lady Waldermere had much disconcerted him.

She arranged to join the Digbys in Italy, in the autumn, and they agreed to spend the winter at the most delightful places they could find.

The sun was indeed shining brightly at last, and the dark past seemed like the clouds which were sinking fast below the horizon, never to dim that sun again.

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Wilfred and Hilda were on the shores of the beautiful blue Mediterranean. She was nestled close to him, wrapped in a cloak, looking now over the sea sparkling in the moonlight, and

now into his eyes, in which there seemed a depth of love unfathomable, and as he clasped her closer in his arms, he softly whispered in her ear, "At last! my own, my very own Hilda! Do you remember the evening when you told me to be brave and strong, and to remember *Que tout vient à point à qui sait attendre!*"

THE END.

